

SEA SALT AND CORDITE

PATRICK VAUX





SEA-SALT AND CORDITE

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

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THE LIEUTENANT AND OTHERS

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**THE ADVENTURES OF LIEUTENANT
LAWLESS, R.N.**

By ROLF BENNETT

LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON

SEA-SALT AND CORDITE

BY

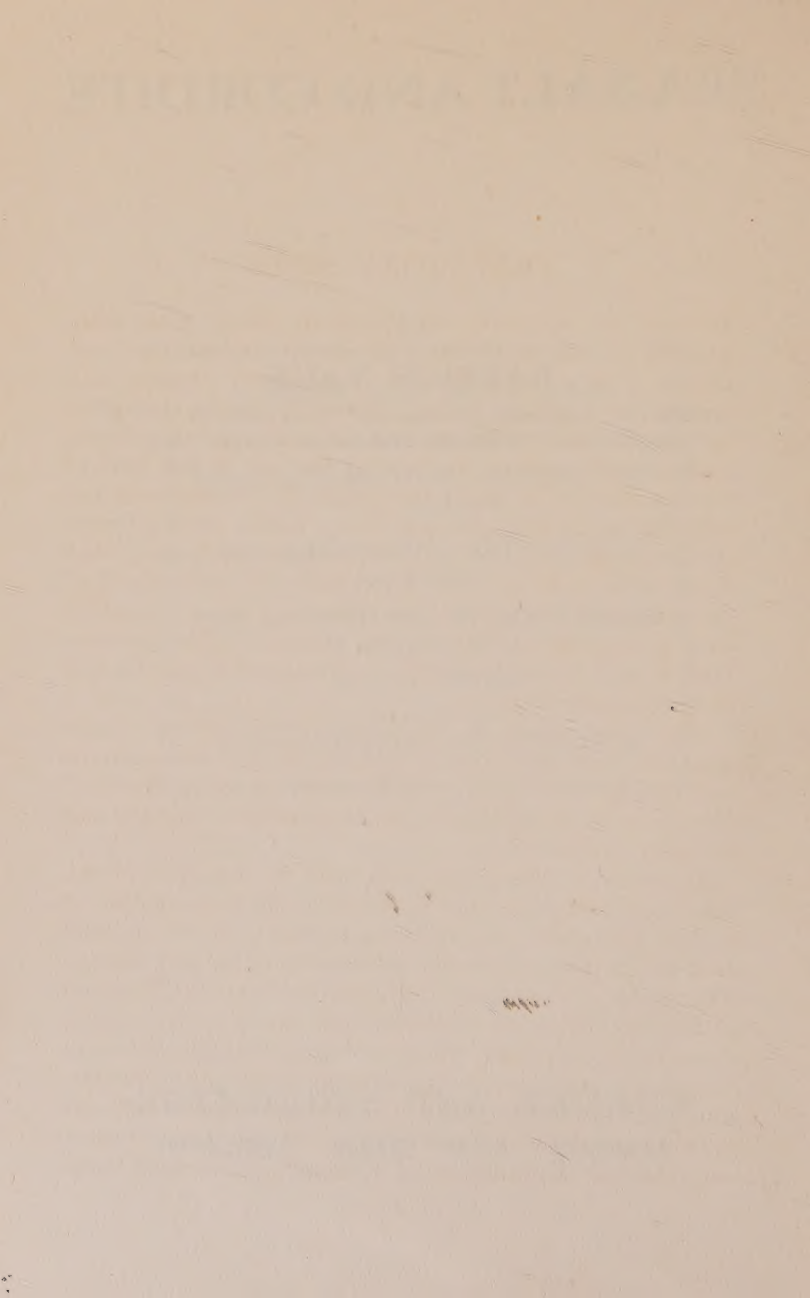
PATRICK VAUX

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HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO



PREFATORY NOTE

THOUGH the writer is not the mild, tubby, little man, wearing glasses, as *Vanity Fair* once described him ; yet neither is he a beetle-browed, bloodthirsty jingoist, as a reviewer in a certain leading diurnal of the London press has put it. His aim throughout the stories in this volume, dealing with modern warfare on the sea, is not that of the sensational or bogey-hatching. It is concerned not with the pomp and glories of war ; but in setting before the jingoistic, and the bellicose, and the unthinking that shout (who make up most of the bellicose !), something of the struggles which naval hostilities will bring ; together with a suggestion of the terrible strain, terrible responsibilities, and terrible abnegation demanded of the human element engaged in it.

War now tends in its operations to become more appalling and precipitate : and should not the incidents and accidents of naval battle be reckoned up by Britons ? For a reason paramountly life-and-death to them, if not to other nationals !

By some of the highly imaginative—highly nervous, mayhap—exception may be taken to the introduction of certain Powers as suppositional enemies, on the ground that this is distasteful and conduces to unfriendly feeling. The writer rejoins that it has merely been the question of finding worthy protagonists, and the choice in such is exceedingly restricted when viewed as suitable pawns in the game. And more ! Are not the bands of an honourable peace strengthened, if it is realized aright what war between great nations means in all its raw hideousness ?—its bestial degradation of humanity's instincts ?—its

carnage not only of bodies but of the brotherhood of man ?

And, in especial, what naval war means, with its merciless reinforcement: the eternal and the ever vigilant—the destroyer of the weak and the craven—England's only true Ally and only true Enemy—the Sea.

Empire Day, 1914.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE SCORING OF COVERLEY, L.S.	9
THE PAGLESHAM KEN	19
POTSHERDS STREAKED WITH SILVER	29
THE VINDICATION OF BINSTED, EX-P.O.	39
THE CIRCUMVENTING OF THE DEUTSCHERS	53
THE SEAL OF HIS MANHOOD	61
PREY OF A GREAT SPOIL	69
CALL OF THE BREED	81
THE NIGHT OF IMRIE'S VENGEANCE	92
GUNS OF DESTINY	108
THE MISFEASANCE OF CAPTAIN NARBOROUGH	115
MARGINAL SAFETY—NÍL	129
THE CASE OF LIEUTENANT BINYON	139
UNTO THIS LAST	149
THE SIRE LIVES IN HIS SONS	154
FLIGHT OF THE WAR-BIRDS	167
THE MAN WHO STOPPED THE WAR	178

THE SCORING OF COVERLEY, L.S.

“WHAT’S wrong with Coverley? We have Coverley,” chorused the Wardroom of H.M.S. *Diomedes*. “There’s no getting past his scoring!”

The staff-surgeon glanced over his ebony-rimmed glasses at the dissentient officers. He laid down his newspaper, and characteristically put his hands together, fingers extended tip on tip.

“Coverley?” he returned, looking at the commander, who had been perusing some of the journalistic pabulum which had come on board that morning with the postman. “Well, the leading seaman’s shooting will not bring us top ship east of Suez. Being home in Australia here ’ll pull him to pieces. Mark my words, he’ll go downwards—or I am no judge of character!”

“Gin and bitters more in your line, doctor!” jerked out the commander, folding his paper as he rose from his sacrosanct arm-chair. “This report of the *Phoenix’s* gunlayer’s test up China way is a bit surprising, I admit. But what’s amiss with Coverley? His hitting is no gamble!”

“You’ll find out soon enough about our champion scorer,” the staff-surgeon answered, in a dry voice, before burying himself behind the *Morning Herald* again. “As you know, I didn’t come off till late this morning from attending an operation in hospital. Wait and see.”

The commander paused in the wardroom doorway.

“What the deuce do you mean?”

“You’ll know in time. Wait and see,” repeated Cairnes, with more than his usual aggravating note of

cynical precision. "It's a wise officer that sometimes fails to see a bluejacket!"

With a snort and a heave of his left shoulder, Commander Hathawaithe took his way to the deck.

"Huh! Coverley going to pieces," grunted the 'Bloke' to himself, as he leisurely paced up and down the gangway, a little after two bells, solacing his perturbed spirit with a cigarette before resuming his manifold duties; "I think not. We'll come out on top again. Steady as a rock, Coverley is with the fore 6-inch."

He paused, glanced around Man-of-war anchorage, where the vessels of the Australian squadron lay at moorings, spick-and-span—Farm Cove with its semicircle of white stonework glaring in the sunshine, backed by the luxuriant Botanic Garden grounds and sloping up to the Domain and Government House.

Well satisfied with life in general, the commander let his gaze rove complacently over Sydney Harbour's brilliant and busy scenes.

A shore-boat that was making for the cruiser took his attention, and he slewed a diligent eye on her.

"Some tomfoolery going on in that skiff!" he remarked caustically to the quartermaster. "What the deuce does she mean by heading this way? Something like a mild scrap on hand in her stern-sheets!"

"It's like she's bringin' off a bluejacket the worse of liquor, sir," observed the quartermaster, ogling the waterman's craft.

"Eh, what!" snapped the commander, his hatchet face lengthening. "Some Jack Shalloo run adrift!"

"Leading Seaman Coverley, sir."

Hathawaithe turned sharp on his heel.

When at seven bells the leading seaman appeared before him for judgment, in the custody of the master-at-arms, disgust was very plainly written upon the 'Bloke's' countenance.

"What's this?" he volleyed in a voice, the depth and volume of which gave the lie to his stumpy stature. "What, what, broken leave by nine hours!—how's that? You've come on board in a most disgraceful condition, my man. Look at your rig—just look at it! Cap lost, lanyard gone, and jumper not fit for a spitting cloth. It has been mops and brooms with you!"

"It was the boys, sir," explained the culprit, in a voice that still spoke afar of copious libations of 'fiery blotch.' "'Cross at Mosman's the boys held me up last night, and I missed my ferry."

"Miss the ferry! And not a boat earlier than this in the morning? Can't you tell the truth? You ran adrift, and never took a single thought about the last boat off or anything else except your swill. D——n you, you are a disgrace to the ship!" The officer's irate eye dwelt frowningly on the bluejacket's figure.

The well-knit, sinewy body and sturdy shoulders, the poise and ease of his body, told of the good effects of naval life and discipline upon a physique, the pointed ears of which, the mouth, chin, low forehead and slanting jaws indicated larrikin progenitors. Not too soon for Coverley's well-being and well-doing had he enlisted into His Britannic Majesty's Naval Forces.

It came to the officer that Cairnes' prognostications might prove to be correct if old associations and impulses arrayed to attack the bluejacket revisiting his native place. The commander foresaw consequences—consequences affecting not only Coverley but the ship's record. And the *Diomedes'* high name was to Hatha-waithe dearer far than his own.

"Nothing to say for yourself?" he snapped, his colour rising. "You are the last man I expected this from. Look at your stripes and badges—and look at yourself. Dirtying your record. A filthy turnout, every way!"

"It wasn't me, sir. It was the boys put me in the

scuppers," repeated the seaman huskily, his bloodshot eyes fixed on the deck. "They filled me up with chiôk, and it threw me out o' trim. I tried to catch the last ferry, but I wasn't myself. It was the boys done it on me!"

"Boys be d——d! Couldn't you look after yourself? Why didn't you send word off, saying you were too slewed to move but would like to be on board up to time. A relief party would have been sent; oh, of course, of course," quoth the 'Bloke.' "Why didn't you do that?"

Coverley's slack lips fell agape. He looked up at the commander. His restless feet came to a standstill.

"I never had a thought on that, sir," he admitted slowly.

"None of you in such a case ever do. You don't think I've got to keep my eye on you all," continued Hathawaithe in steely pleasantry. "You'll stand in on enough 10A, my man, as'll teach you to get a purchase on your legs the next time you've got to catch the last shore-boat." And forthwith condign punishment was decreed.

As the leading seaman limbered forward, sullen and ashamed, the staff surgeon who was passing along, stopped him, and exchanged some words.

Coverley's sudden start of surprise, the look of perturbation and dismay on his sickly grey face—Cairnes' negative shake of the head accompanying his reply—the 'Bloke' glimpsed out of the corner of his eye, and speculated deep thereon.

"Another human specimen under your microscope, eh! Your judgment in choosing it ought to be commended," he shot out crisply to the man of healing coming abreast of him.

Cairnes threw a glance at the bluejacket, who was trailing amidships with hunched shoulders and leaden feet.

"I noticed him half-seas over this morning as I was coming down to the landing steps, and steered away to avoid seeing him. It was on his dying mother that operation I had been following. . . . Very clever, very—rather a daring attempt to save her."

"His mother!"

"Yes. A widow. . . . Seems to have sent her a good lump sum every month. . . . He went over to Mosman Bay to her old address—didn't know she had just shifted and has had to go into hospital. He must have fallen into the arms of his old mates."

"Poor devil, poor devil!" commented the commander in matter-of-fact tones. "Unlucky for the ship this outbreak of his, for we need him to break the *Phoenix's* record. I should have given him habitual* leave to keep him safe."

"You'll get your chance soon enough. Hathawaithe, you have no heart of flesh! So far as you are concerned the man is a mere machine for hiking up the ship's record. You'll think differently some day—some day. . . . Things of flesh and blood are of infinite more moment than even gunnery records. Human nature is not all self and routine."

With a brusque laugh Commander Hathawaithe turned away.

When, later on, just previous to the annual gunlayers' test, general leave was granted at Melbourne, the night before moving out, Coverley was sent for by the 'Bloke.'

The executive officer looked him up and down and round about—he looked him inside and out—with a harsh and warning eye.

"My lad, go slow on shore," he grunted. "I don't want to see you in the report; you'll get disrated. Keep in mind what I've said to you."

The bluejacket saluted. By the hesitating look on his face he appeared to have something to unburden or

* Leave to go ashore once in three months.

explain, but the appearance of the commanding officer closed the interview.

That evening when Hathawaithe was coming off late from the festive amenities of a dinner-party, and feeling joyously at peace with one and all, the coxswain of the boat awaiting him handed a letter as he paused before stepping into her stern-sheets.

"Officer of the watch thought you might like to see this at once, sir," explained the burly seaman. "It was fetched aboard by special messenger."

An exclamation of wonder broke from the officer. He peered at the superscription scrawled across the face of the envelope—went a few steps toward the electric standard the better to scrutinize the writing—looked inquisitively at both sides of the envelope, then slit it open with his thumbnail.

He read—then gasped audibly.

Stepping yet nearer the light he again perused the letter. Studiously unparliamentary expressions, not to be reproduced in print, escaped him.

"Rowley," he grunted, beckoning to the coxswain, "know a place called 'Tim Hennigan's'?"

"I've heerd of it, sir," replied Rowley cautiously, speculating therewith if the 'Bloke' was really all he was taken to be, "way back up o' Flinders Street, or thereabout, sir—I'm given to believe!"

"Just so," snapped the officer, "you'll carry on up town as smartly as you can; and——" But the rest of the instructions was intended for no other ear.

Next morning at seven bells, Coverley was summoned to the commander's presence.

"What do you mean by this?" the 'Bloke' asked in an ominously small voice, his left-hand fingers tapping the letter outspread on his desk before him. "You must have been mad to send it. The captain'll deal with you himself, now. If it hadn't been for this gunlayer's firing ahead of us, you'd have been left behind, and

logged as deserter. Do you take me for your wet-nurse ? ”

Coverley's hands strained on his cap. He uttered not a word.

“Speak up,” snorted the commander. “You know what it'll mean if you go before the captain. Didn't I warn you ? ”

“It was just that, sir,” the bluejacket replied lamely. “Ye said another drift ashore 'ud get me disrated ; and when the liquor left me moored last night, up-town, I feels desperate most 'cause o' my old woman Sydney-way. It came to me——”

“You'll feel more desperate after the commanding officer is finished with you,” grimly rejoined Hathawaithe. “D——n you, what do you take me for ? ”

“Beggin' pardon, sir, but at Sydney you asks me why I hadn't sent off to you 'cause you keeps an eye on us all for the sake of the ship.”

The ‘Bloke's’ fingers ceased tattooing against the inculcating letter. Swaying round on his swivel chair he glared in stupefaction at the seaman. Slowly his black eyebrows met as recollection crowded on him.

Commander Hathawaithe thought of the C.O.'s sarcasm—thought of the Wardroom's quizzing, and of the satirical comments from the other ships—and gnawed his taut upper lip.

He thought, too, of the *Phoenix's* record.

“You're either d——d simple-headed or astute,” he growled. “I'll let this pass if you have no more of such foolery, and keep your mouth shut, d'ye hear. Don't disgrace the ship, much less me or any other officer. You don't want your discharge clipped ?—or something less to send your mother, eh ? Let me see the right Australian in you again, Coverley.”

Curtly he dismissed the bluejacket. The apple of Coverley's thrapple worked as he saluted.

Hathawaithe wondered if he had made a fool of himself.

For weeks past loading parties in working and spare hours had been loading and firing dummy projectiles and cartridges in practice for the gunlayers' competition.

It is the men's test.

That test against the time when bursting shells and thudding projectiles have torn and crumpled deck and superstructure, wrecking everything not behind stout armour, and sweeping away the fire-control platforms aloft whence the firing has been directed.

Gunlayers are then thrown upon their own skill and judgment.

But on board the *Diomedes*, finishing her trial runs, no pæan went up of prospective triumph.

"The trial shots are not encouraging, Hathawaithe," commented the captain in a very acrid voice, taking his binoculars off the target. "Short of last year's hits. The *Phoenix*'ll top our score."

When at length the test was begun the lighter pieces showed results that made the Bridge look glum, very glum.

"You seem to have cockered the men skew-eyed," snapped the 'Old Man' in disgust to the commander, who was also gunnery officer. "I never have thought much of Scott's gilguys, and all, from the *Scylla* upwards—only a series of flukes same as ours last year! This means a £50 note I drop for backing my own ship, confound it!"

"The six-inch runs'll pull us up top, sir," Hathawaithe hastened to assert.

But his heart was in his boots.

The cruiser turned and retraced her course, and the after 6-inch prepared. The moment the 'Commence' sounded, bang, bang, bang went the gun in shocks of excruciatingly sharp sound.

Through the pellucid atmosphere the hits were

anxiously counted, till the 'Cease Fire' went, and that run was finished.

"Ah! the scoring does improve," said the Head of the Ship; "eight rounds, six hits. But if for'a'd they don't improve on that the *Diomedes* can't come out top ship, this side Suez. Slackness, slackness! Too much leave—too much junketing—spoil any ship, I tell you!"

Again the cruiser turned. Again the bugle shrilled forth; and this time Coverley with the fore 6-inch started on the last lap.

Hathawaithe breathed short, as with the glasses jammed against his eyes he stared at the punctured target.

"If Coverley 'ud top his own score by one," he muttered noting the hits. "One!—just one!"

Eight rounds—eight hits.

Still, bang, bang, bang continued the fore 6-inch.

Then there burst a sudden stillness amidst the reek of cordite; and while the gun-crew waited the regulation pause for the miss-fire the time limit ran out, and the 'Cease Fire' soared forth. It was followed by the 'Secure,' so the usual routine on the occasion of a miss-fire was not carried out in its entirety.

"What did I say?" ejaculated Cairnes, who with others of the Wardroom had been watching and impatiently awaiting the results. "It's a tie with the *Phoenix*. Coverley might have scored, though, just another hit to give me the lie; but, ah, the adjustment between brain and nerves is too delicate to be trifled with."

Shortly after, the commander when forward paused in passing the 6-inch quick-firer, where were the gun-layer and a petty officer about to extract its charge.

"One more hit would have done it, Coverley," rasped Hathawaithe rather truculently. "It would have brought more to your reputation and to your pocket as well."

"She has a bit of a sulky temper, sir," replied the Australian, laying a hand on the gun.

As he did so he glanced at the petty officer who had opened the breech, and was about to place a hand on the base of the charge. Alarm intense, irrevocable, sprang into the P.O.'s face—instant in its significance. For on the breech being opened the inrush of air fanned the cordite bag which had become ignited by the miss-fire.

In that flash of thought Coverley hurled himself on the commander, even as in the rear of the gun there gouted out flame—a stunning roar—and a cloud of smoke hiding gun, officer, and men.

Hathawaithe they found lying on his half-flayed face, unconscious, the blood also oozing from his ears, eyes, and mouth. But above him sprawled the gunlayer, with left arm and shoulder and the back of his skull blown away. Of the petty officer there were but sickening scattered remains.

As bearer parties carried away the dead and the insensible, Cairnes, hurrying off in front of them, was stopped by the C.O.

"Commander'll live?"

"Yes, he'll be all right in time, sir."

Just then the bearer parties stepped past; and as the second came abreast of Coverley's captain he bared his grey head in salute.

"The *Diomedes*' score?" said he deeply, "who can ever top it now."

THE PAGLESHAM KEN

LIEUTENANT HOWICK avidly emptied his liqueur glass, which he had just refilled.

"Ah! Uncle Jim knew good stuff when he laid down that cognac the year I was born. . . . Edith on the terrace, you think?"

Commander Paglesham raised his eyes from thoughtfully tipping the ash of his cigar into the silver-mounted couch on the smoking-table by his right elbow.

"Perhaps she is," he replied; "if not there, she'll probably be down by the fishpond. Keep about the grounds, James; I'm going back in a few minutes. Best to be on board early."

As Howick stepped through the French window, that lay open to the soft autumn air, his cousin's eye rested on the lithe figure, till the near pillar of the colonnade along the front of the old grey house hid it from view. Then his gaze travelled to the naval prints and portraits lining the walls of the room, some of them older than the wainscoting; and it was dark with two hundred years and more.

From the quaint copper-plate depicting Sir Christopher Mengs, Vice-Admiral of the White, shot through the throat on the last of the Four Days' Fight in 1666, and dying on his high poop supported by a wounded Paglesham, down to the most recent addition—a gravure of Collier's striking portrait of the commander's father, Rear-Admiral Sir James Paglesham, V.C., K.C.B.—his naval forbears were there, generation after generation, all save one.

He that went down with his gun-brig off Port Charlotte, Roadtown, W.I. His picture-frame hung there, empty.

Searchingly the officer of steam and steel and aeronautics looked at each of the portraits, as if seeking counsel from that resoluteness and resourcefulness, that high sense of imperious duty, stamped on them all—from the first of the full-lipped, full-faced, tall-browed ‘tarpaulins,’ to Sir James of the down-drawn mouth and keen features.

“Yes, something’ll have to be done with James,” the commander muttered, as if in answer to them, slipping the stopper into the decanter as he rose to his feet; “just throwing himself away, he is. . . . Something to teach him that we live for the Navy, and the Navy for England and the Empire. . . . Just that. . . .”

With a sigh he turned to the *escritoire*, that was littered with the estate accounts which had brought him up that afternoon from the Medway, where general leave had been granted to the sea-going Division, and began bundling them together. On hearing a light, flying footstep crunch the gravel of the terrace he looked up in surprise.

“Just the very person James is hunting for!” he exclaimed in raillery.

“And just James it is I am avoiding,” returned his sister, throwing an anxious look over her shoulder as she entered by the French window.

Sir Charles elevated his swart eyebrows—stood gazing at her, waiting an explanation.

A flush suffused the clear cameo-like features, burning through the delicate tan of her complexion. With a petulant heave of her shoulders she swayed past him to gain the hall.

“Edie, what is it? What has Jim done?”

There was a caress in Paglesham’s voice; but, also, that lurking enunciation of steel his bluejackets knew so well. It arrested his sister in her hurried exit.

She replied, chin tilted and face half averted :

“ Not what he has done but what he expects me to do ! ”

A puzzled expression gathered on her brother's blunt features. He stepped to her, trying to read the winsome young face.

“ What he expects you to do ? ”

“ It is nothing ; really, dear ! Just a foolish matter between Cousin Jim and myself,” she admitted haltingly, hand pressed on cheek as if to hide the colour mantling there. “ Just a promise I was to keep the next time he and I met ; but I didn't think it was to be so soon. . . . No ! . . . Oh, no ! . . . ”

A sudden thought illumed her brother's discernment. In his dark eyes there rose surprise, perturbation, too. Taking her hand gently from her cheek, he brought the rose-flushed face under his close scrutiny.

“ Edie ! Oh, Edie ! ” he exclaimed lovingly, and in half-unconscious warning.

Eye met eye in that mutual confidence ever between them.

She put her hands on his firm, broad shoulders as if seeking strength from their staunchness. Since the death of their parents Charles had never failed her.

“ I cannot fulfil my promise,” she confided in a low, tremulous voice. “ You know Jim better than I do ; and, and—do we Pagleshams ever, ever forget what sent him to the bottom with his poor men ? ”

She gave a backward motion of her head to the empty picture-frame with its sombre filling of wainscot.

Tightly pursing his lips, the commander nodded in reply.

He rejoined significantly, if only in defence of his beloved Service :

“ Ah, there is nothing like that with us to-day.”

“ I know that, of course,” Edith hurried on with ;
“ but, Charlie, the horror of even the idea of it—at least

to the Paglesham you and me . . . And Jim ? . . . the future ? . . . It would break more than my heart . . .”

Her pleading, harassed voice trailed into silence.

“Hum,” snapped her brother, “the best thing to be done meantime is for me to get underweigh for Sheerness ; I’ll think over what you hint at, Edie, dear. You keep under Aunt Charlotte’s lee till we are away, old sweetheart ; James won’t run in under her guns !”

Paglesham shook his head as on his sister leaving the room he began to collect his papers. He paused in sudden thought.

His eye roved outside, past the terrace with its smooth green sward and its beds of roses, gilliflowers, pinks, and tall bushes of lavender between the lichened balustrade and the gravelled walk—past the long fragrant gardens, that seemed to be lost in the woodlands stretching down to Watling Street. His eye sought across hamlet and homestead, down past creek and salting, away to where in the fading light Sheerness lay low, a mere bluish blur against the vague ash-grey of water and sky.

“I ought to have foreseen this,” he muttered ; “and, as she hints, Jim’s tendency ! . . . He must be pulled up sharp for her sake and the good of the Service. We Pagleshams know—we know.”

Steadily the Fiat car dropped from the uplands, by side-road and winding lane where from the fields and plantations of birch, chestnut, and cob rose the cool, sweet smell of green things and mother earth—down to Bobbing and the marish grounds, and the tang of the sea.

Over the back of the south-east weald the moon was rising yellow and enormous into a gloomy cloudscape, making sinister wonderland of earth and heavens, and lighting up the skirts of mist fringing the Isle of Sheppey.

“Do you smell that ?” cried Paglesham into the lieutenant’s ear ; “fog. Rain, also, out of the sou’ard. Thick as peasoup, by the time we’re outside. A nice job you’ll have, James, keeping the middle watch !”

"Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea!" Howick exclaimed. "What happened to Edie, sir? I couldn't find her anywhere."

Enigmatically came the reply:

"Went off about someone who is looking at Heart's Desyre. Perhaps it will be occupied. Edie's own property, you know."

Howick glanced at him in wonder, then burying himself in his hopes and fears lapsed into silence.

On the car pulling up before the well-known naval hotel in Blue Town, where the lights were greying in the thin smur surging in from the sea, the lieutenant lingered beside his cousin, who was giving orders to the driver, then after some seconds disappeared within the hospitable portals.

Some minutes later Paglesham found him in the smoke-room, busily discussing Apollinaris-and-Irish with some fellow-officers.

"Hello, who's coming on board?" asked the commander, greeting the company; "I'm going off. . . . Coming, Howick?"

"Not just yet, sir," his cousin replied, pressing the button for the waiter.

With a brusque nod, the senior officer turned away. But, when on the outer doorstep, he halted in doubt and anxiety; thoughts of his sister, and of James with the duties ahead of him that night, assailed him.

"It'll steady Jim if I hold on in the smoke-room. He's all right, but hasn't got himself in hand quite yet," reflected Paglesham, turning back into the hotel.

But between the swing-doors he recollected that he was to dine with his commanding officer, and glancing at his watch he hurried away.

It was with all the precision of a splendid machine the division went out to sea that night, against a falling glass, and a streaming night-sky; for a change of wind to the eastward had brought rain with the thickness.

One by one the officers of the battleship's wardroom disappeared into their cabins. When the commander, his waterproof glistening with wet, looked in only his cousin and the captain of marines were there arguing some point.

"A foul night coming along," curtly remarked Paglesham, without entering. "Better turn in, Howick. It'll be the weather to take the stiffening out of any one." And with a jerk of his chin, he disappeared.

"'Old Pagle' is wideawake at any rate," huskily drawled the marine officer in a yawning voice. "Almost as good as a wet-nurse to you, Jimmy!"

'Old Pagle' was wideawake.

Inwardly he stormed as he made for the upper deck and another look round before turning in for a little.

"Duty for him topsides, and there he is as he is, and not taking enough sleep to freshen a rat! . . . He gets weighed up to-morrow by the captain. . . . Huh! Tooting again! . . . By G——d, he does."

To him of that naval family—one of the many upon which the Sea and British naval traditions have set their sure stamp for generations back, and wrought as a cunningly wrought instrument for the fulfilment of the will of England—to diverge from the strait and narrow path leading to mental and physical fitness for duty was as dishonourable as treacherous to the Service.

"Huh! James ought to have stuck to his family's business. Cotton spinning more in his line!" Paglesham savagely, derisively, grunted to himself as he turned in, forgetting that every family of worth has its beginning; forgetting, too, that his first far-off naval ancestor had been the son of a linen merchant of Crutchet Friars.

It was the sound of a gun that awakened him in his first sleep. Jumping half-dressed out of his cot he grabbed his seaboots with one hand, and switched on the electric with the other, noting as he did so that eight bells had just gone.

"Gun from the flagship," he muttered. "We're into thick weather."

As he quickly wrapped a thick white scarf round his throat, then put on his rubber coat, a series of desperate moanings broke out, to be almost instantly repeated near at hand and in the distance. Snatching up his cap he hurried out of the cabin.

For a few seconds he stood on the deck, straining his ears and staring to port into the blinding, stinging night that as the battleship drove onward, second in the weather line, streamed past dense with fog and mizzle. Uneasiness, a feeling of danger greatening in him, he hastened to gain the bridge.

At the foot of the ladder a tired figure passed him, and he recognised the officer coming off watch. The commander inwardly uttered anathemas, comprehending at once Howick's slack relief of him just on 'little one bell.'

"A filthy night, sir! The wind is stiffening," remarked Lieutenant Howick, peering under his hand at him when he encountered him by the charthouse doorway. "It is——"

"Just the weather to knock sense into one," snapped Paglesham, irritated by the lack of alertness in his cousin's voice and manner. "Too many vessels making around for it to be comfortable in all this muck. . . . Flagship is next ahead!" he added significantly, moving along the dim bridge.

The battleship invincibly butted through the rising head seas, the smother of which drove home to the bridge but seldom in far-flung spray rending on the weather screens. Through the rain-shot drift the few figures high up there in the wet and the biting breeze showed like wraiths called out of the surrounding void by the blasts of tormented sound from the warship's syren.

Howick exchanged some words with the quartermaster—who with a seaman hung over the wheel, their

every sense a needle of vigilance—then strained his eyes to pick up the next ahead.

One touch of the ram, and there would be a disaster ringing round the world.

Again a foghorn droned forth, this time near to star-board ; and another joined in away off the quarter. The muffled roarings almost overpowered the faint hammering on a ship's bell somewhere to port.

“ Windjammer, sir, comin' down.”

“ I hear her,” remarked the lieutenant sourly. “ Hope she doesn't throw us into sixes and sevens ! ”

Wiping the wet out of his eyes, he peered into the smoking night in the direction of the tinkling. The weak desperate notes tintinnabulated confusingly through the hubbub of whistle and syren. He held in his breath, wondering how the sailer exactly bore.

Commander Paglesham had also picked out the helpless tinkling, and halted at the top of the ladder on his way aft for inspection of the fog-buoy now trailing astern of each unit.

Down behind the white bulkhead running across the wide half-deck aft, where a marine in side-arms and white belt keeps silent and ceaseless watch, the C.O. on hearing the sailer's thin jangle had heaved himself out of his cot. But he was making ready slowly, telling himself the young officer on the bridge must exercise confidence in himself.

Then, of a sudden, he ran through his outer cabin, his lips very taut and grim.

Lieutenant Howick had frowned to himself as he moved up the bridge. He could see nothing, hear nothing. It came to him the windjammer must have tacked.

He was aware of a general torpidity in mind and body, above all of a consuming thirst ; but thoughts of a bowlful of steaming cocoa comforted him. Just a taste too much of spirits of late, and too little sleep into the bargain—it was owing to that, so he told himself.

Nothing wrong, oh, no ! Some fellow-officers were not so careful. And, besides, he had Edie with her high ideals. . . .

Then out of the corner of his right eye he won a glimpse of great vague bows coming up inside of the battleship, for her next astern had sheered erratically out of station. Ahead sounded the wild hammering on a ship's bell. There loomed the prow of a large barque bearing down on the port bow.

The ram of the next astern crunching into their engine-room—or the sailing-ship riven and crushed under the battleship's forefoot. These were the alternatives flashing across the lieutenant's brain.

Something transfixed his instantness of resource and resolution. Mentally he wavered as to his course of action, and in the same moment became confused. Yet the thin, telephonic cries of the alarmed hands on board the barque as they leaped to man the braces—almost the next instant, the syren's belch of sound—and a momentary consciousness of his terrible plight—all went to force initiative in Howick even in the second it had died.

As he sprang back to the wheel the commander jumped forward. Their voices intermingled in the same command.

With some rigging thrown in a raffle, and a spar or two carried away, the barque surged clear as the *Royal George* grazed past, the muzzles of the guns in her amidships casemate carrying away also some of the sailer's running gear.

"A very close shave, a very close shave, indeed !" repeated the C.O., some minutes later to the commander, when, the tangle in formation having been straightened out, they stood in the charthouse and exchanged comments. "Howick did just the right thing to avert, well, what might have been a very ugly smash with the next astern or utter disaster with the confounded windjammer.

... D'ye know, neither you nor I could have done it better."

To this Sir Charles made no reply.

And it was not his wont to withhold commendation, when it was deserved.

Now, next morning, immediately after breakfast, when Paglesham had gone to his cabin for a few minutes, his cousin tapped on the door, and asked permission to speak to him.

Coldly his cousin bade him enter. But on the lieutenant's face there was a look, which very deeply interested 'Old Pagle.'

"Charles," said Howick, dropping for once the formality between them in naval life. "I want to tell you, well, it's this . . . that . . . that, I have foreshortened on liquor. You know, well——"

The lieutenant paused for a few seconds. A rush of colour invaded his brown face. Looking away from the piercing dark eyes, he blurted out :

"You were on the bridge, this morning, when I almost had a smash. . . . You know, you know what I mean ; I know you do, Charles ? "

The frigid expression fled from the commander's hard-bitten features, and upon them came a suggestion of that innerly man who won the respect and admiration of his bluejackets so wholeheartedly. His right hand leaped forth and gripped Howick's left wrist.

"Ah, Jim, the Navy has got you at last," he returned in a grave, glad voice. "I marked in you, this morning—but there, you and I'll bury the whole horrible affair. . . . Howick, self-repression—devotion, mind, and body, even to the death—for the sake of Our Service that holds the seas—these are the true British officer's. . . . Just be a youngster again, and write and tell Edie all about your troubles once more. I think, James, the occupier is now found for Heart's Desyre ! "

POTSHERDS STREAKED WITH SILVER

LOWELL, chief engineer of the ss. *United Kingdom*, made a grab at the granitine teapot as it careered across the mess-room table, the sugar-basin and plates in its wake.

"What do you say his name is?" he repeated, holding the teapot breast-high with right hand in his access of surprise. "Rippon is the skipper of this boat, or I'm luney. By thunders, she does roll!"

"Was," corrected the Third, his shovel-mouth filled with sea-pie. "Just afore you skipped abroad, old Rip got badly knocked out by some of the strikers—hands of his, they say—so the manager put the Italian K's 'old man' into this tub. Padgham, by name. D'ye know aught about him?"

Not until Lowell realized that the Third was staring inquisitively, and in astonishment, did he draw back his arm, and put the teapot down on the dirty-grey, glazed cloth covering the table.

"Padgham!"

Again he repeated the name, as if doubting his ears.

"Did you say, he's Padgham?"

"Yes. Him that was captain of the *Italian Kingdom*. It's all the same who he is! We'll make food for the fishes this time," returned the junior engineer cheerfully, half-filling his cup of tea with sugar. "This old tank'll never see Antwerp."

"Middling height?—dark face?—scar on the left cheek, and a mouth like a rat-trap?"

The chief engineer jerked out the words slowly, reluctant of voice, as if trying to convince himself his description would not be corroborated. Over his

short, sallow face passed a wave of undecipherable feeling.

The Third regarded his new Head with redoubled interest and speculation.

He stoked his mouth, and, as he masticated the food in the eagerness of one whose meals ashore of late had meant the tightening, not the loosening, of his belt, mumbled :

"Just him! . . . 'Bloody Fist' I've heard him called, 'cause of his temper and way of handlin' slackers. . . . He was up at the shippin' office when they managed to rush me and t'others through the strikers' pickets and their d——d peaceful persuasion. Oh, he looks a 'driver.' "

"A 'driver' is he? I'll say, he maybe has been driven in his time. More than him can handle their 'dukes,' my mannie," Lowell drily replied, his face again under control. "He'll best keep to the bridge, and leave me to do all the 'driving' of the 'black squad.' I know my work, and he knows his, we'll say. . . . Yes, a taste of dirty weather! . . . There she dips again. . . ."

To a heavy fling of the steamer tons of cross-sea had fallen on the deck in a thunderous patter; and water squirted through the cracks in the mess-room door. Lowell gesticulated significantly to the streams of brine and shrugged his shoulders.

The Third gulped down his fifth cupful of black, copperish tea and sugar, and, having bitten a piece off the coil of sweet Cavendish in his tin tobacco-box, stuffed the quid into his right cheek, then made away for his bunk. But the 'Chief' remained sitting, swaying a little to the floundering of the vessel, and staring gloomily at the lamp wriggling in the gimbals.

"That is just me," he muttered; "dirty-hearted and wriggling along like the strikers for easy times. . . . Not enough grit in me; and because I was in liquor I've dumped into this d——d billet, with him on the bridge.

By Jimminy, his face'll be a bonny sight when he sees me! 'Bloody Fist' he is called now?—well, I've seen the day——”

He ceased. Carefully he extracted a bit of plug from a tattered rubber pouch, and, having teased it apart, stuffed the tobacco into the black clay ferreted out of an inner pocket, but all the while grimly regarding the nobbly knuckles of his short, broad hands.

For a minute or two he meditatively sucked at the unlit pipe, weighing the beat of his engines, the lurching of the steamer, and the unexpected features of his situation.

“Him up topsides!” he exclaimed savagely, biting on the stem of his clay. “There'll be hell to pay, and no pitch hot—same as before! And now liquor has rotted the heart of me. But, this time, I'll have the upper-hand of him, ay, through his own work. Well! Here goes for report number one.”

The squalls sweeping out of the north-east as the *United Kingdom* left London River astern had settled into a stiff gale with thin rain, driving the scud like smoke under the leaden-grey clouds streaming downwind. In the west, faint yellow streaks mistily staining some lighter strata of the vapours hinted of the sinking sun, and gave emphasis to the louring gloom.

Lifelines had already been reeved along the decks, and upperworks; the hatchways secured, and tarpaulins reinforced. Sulkily the steamer butted through the seas, her decks running white and scuppers gouting. Sooner than she could rise a back surge, white-crested and mountainous, smacked against her port quarter with its burying weight; and drunkenly she staggered, all her rivets clattering.

As the engineer clawed his way amidships he groaned: “Kind of glad I am, Dicky is topsides!”

The officer of the watch, a long, thin man in shining oilskins with sou'-wester bunched under his chin, stared into his face when he stepped on the bridge.

"Hey! Wantin' the captain? It hasn't taken you long to find out things," croaked the first mate sinisterly. "Serve us right for pushin' out this old crock again' the strikers. . . . Captain, in the chartroom. Hey! Your time's come!"

"Knew she is a crock, did ye? Ye must have been d——d hard-set on 'dead horse,' mister!" Lowell gibed in passing; "or, maybe, it's this threat o' war around that's making a brave Britisher thinking of saving his skin!"

Captain Padgham, who was standing with his back to the door, reading the barometer and aneroid hanging alongside the log-desk, wheeled when the gush of wet air pouring in through the doorway swirled the chart and its leaden weights off the table.

"A very dirty night ahead, mate, the glass I——"

But he stopped suddenly, lips parted, black eyes riveted on the engineer in a heavy incredulous stare, as Lowell, leaning against the door, secured some privacy.

The 'Chief' jerked out, eyeing him very alertly:

"Just a joy meeting, eh, skipper?"

At the sound of his voice Captain Padgham's mouth closed with a snap. On his dark, rough-hewn features a deep flush flamed like a danger signal.

"You?" he pumped out huskily. "You aboard?"

"Seems like that, don't it. But, sooner than be aboard along o' you, I'd starve among the rats and pickarounds. Oh, you're getting known. 'Bloody Fist' they call you, now! But that isn't all of the smear 'cross your clean name, eh?"

The officer whirled forward. Broad, clumsy, shapeless in his reefer, shawl, and oilskins, he looked in the light of the lamp like an avalanche of fury.

"It wasn't your evidence that got me clear, was it? D——n you," he snarled, with ugly twisted lips, bringing up close face-to-face with his engineer.

Lowell, edging away, shot out sulkily:

"Don't be so all-fired hurricanish, d'yer hear? By-gones ain't by-gones yet—some folks ashore don't sleep. Savvy, eh? . . . Oh, I'm not so fond of you as to seek a look of your ugly mug; and it's my mark on that cheek to remind you. It's that scrapheap of old iron your owners call engines that brings me on your —— bridge. They cough and champ like sick things. First," he enumerated sarcastically, "tail shaft and thrust. . . ."

The master listened for some seconds to the list of defects. Of a sudden the black look on his saturnine features deepened, and viciously he grunted:

"Stow it, Danny! Think I haven't sized you up; ay, years ago. What have you been since ye were a lad? —a slacker! I say, a slacker! Even in that awkward business of mine ye slacked, when a word from you would have cleared my name. Defects be d——d! Use your tools. . . . Slew'd as usual, eh, when you signed on, or it's not you that would be here."

The chief engineer contorted his weakish face in a sinister grimace.

He shot his barbed arrow.

"But once I wasn't so slew'd, eh, Dicky, ay, once? Who hit first, yon time? I could say what some folk 'ud jump to hear," he jeered, turning to go. "Oh, I know why you were in such a blamed hurry to make away, for all ye'd like to bear a hand against the foreigners, if they force us to fight. . . . Use my tools—ay, that I will, but to get you elsewhere 'n into port. You——"

His words were lost in the tumult of a furious squall of rain and sleet, that pelted the steamer like small shot, to eddy away howling and scuffling over the leagues of darkening storm. But, as he went, the captain watched him with dilated pupils, and glancing about in a kind of scared anger to detect if Lowell had by any chance been overheard as he had stepped out on the bridge.

A little after midnight the gale shifted into south by

east. A heavy run of head seas threw its weight on the steamer, even as if trying to pin her down among the breakers that were boiling up in the darkness with a spectral flicker of foam. The propellor being in the air half of the time, engines had been slowed; and now the vessel struggled amid great rushes of water with steerage way on her and little else.

Lowell, streaked with oily grime from head to foot, climbed up to the starting platform, having fitted a new bolt in one of the central sections of the thrust-block.

"That job's finished," he rasped to the Third, clutching the guard-rail as the steamer toppled steep, and glancing at the steam and water gauges to his right, "We'll hold the thrust together, if it don't jump outside itself. Then in that case, my son, it'll be lifebelts, and a souse to Davy Jones. . . . It's up to me to keep her."

The snub-nosed Third looked at him; in his voice was a great and bitter fierceness. But already the masterman of steam and steel was moving along the gratings—keen-eyed, keener-eared, and tireless and purposeful in his assiduity.

Thoughts, prompted by the dull chaotic resonance of the seas hammering and clawing on the vessel's thin sides, came to the junior engineer of a snug and peaceful kitchen in Grays, where a grey cat would be dozing on the fender before the dying fire, and the silence punctuated by the occasional fretting of an infant in the adjoining room as the young mother in her sleep moved the ensheltering arm. But his 'Chief' was deaf to the hungry waters' mouthing; even as he was indifferent to the sickening swaying and half-circular motion of the steel walls, of the columnar masses of machinery, of the floor plates beneath and the tiers of grating above; while great avalanches of water caught the steamer in their shock and smother.

Gleams from the flickering lamps streaked the polished

heads jogging up and down ; flashes illumed the bright brass and steel of the cranks as round as they came and went in obedient mobility to the unceasing thrust and pull of the connecting-rods. But, brightest gleamed the hatred in Lowell's deep eyes.

With peculiar satisfaction there came back to him snatches of hostile memories, and feuds with Padgham in boyhood and in later years ; culminating in Lowell's expulsion from the house because of their quarrelling and his unsteady habits.

He growled to himself :

"Always been top-dog, Dicky ! Even the poor dead lass that cast a kind eye on me, he filched away—ay, the Devil's kind to his own, damn him ! . . . From my own mother, never a good word, but always for Dicky. I'll hound him down."

Just then the *United Kingdom* pitched heavily ; and hastily the Third throttled down the engines as they broke into a mad fling.

It occurred to Lowell that the sea might snatch his revenge from him. Tempestuously he roared :

"Coax 'em, can't you coax 'em, ye slush-slinger ! Let 'em rip, just let 'em, and it's the sea-floor we'll find."

A volley of foul oaths escaped him.

Long-legged and of crooked shoulders, Lowell, balancing himself, long-spout oilcan and sweat rag in either hand, cut a grotesque, mad figure as the steamer careered wildly and green sea cascaded through the skylights and the fiddleys. His posture, his jerky gestures, were of vehemence and hatred incarnated.

Surprised, the Third kept a sullen silence.

But when some minutes later Lowell, in answer to a call from the bridge, crawled up through the fiddley exit, and gripping a lifeline stood in shelter of a ventilator and listened to Captain Padgham, he felt life could have no sweeter moments

The master had thrown out his left arm where weltered the dim seas hurling themselves on the vessel's bows with a whelming rush. In the hubbub of the elements his voice came in shreds of sound.

"More weigh . . . keep her on to the . . . lifeboats stoved in. . . . Must . . . more weigh . . ."

"Engines . . . jump away . . . shaft; and then——"

The 'Chief' ended his reply with a very significant nod.

Then on second thoughts he added :

"I'll nurse 'em. . . . Guess why ? . . . port. . . ."

To this there came :

"You know nothing, curse you !"

It was as if a swirl of the storm had torn those words from a lacerated and choking throat.

And as Lowell, now making for the fiddleys and below, paused to look astern where the lights and gleaming port-holes of a great liner were drawing into view the master stared at the dim figure as if hatred might slay in its glance. When the next second the engineer disappeared on a dull rasping squeal, a crunching, breaking in under-note through the clamour—to be followed by a pitch of the steamer as if she was taking a header into a void—Padgham's first racing thought of was Lowell's death below.

So it was that with her tail shaft and thrustblock broken, the *United Kingdom* broached to, and the waters swept over her.

Rockets soared from her bridge. Her syren boomed for help. The seas leaped out of the darkness. They sluiced across her, levelling the bulwarks, twisting the rails, and smashing, streaming over, pouring into her skylights and hatchways.

One combing breaker smote her wickedly amidships. Padgham was caught in its jaws as he struggled to release himself from his lifeline to which he was lashed ; and he was lifted, then dropped on to the deck below. He was

vanishing in the spume ebbing down the starboard side when the chief engineer, dashing out, dragged him back, with right limb broken and ribs fractured. Others of the crew were gone, twisting like ants, into the grey, howling void.

Already the Orient liner astern was hooting of succour at hand.

Sheltered by the overhanging poop, Lowell, with his right arm round the groaning captain, marked her lifeboat crawl down the path of white light thrown by the liner's searchlight—cross the bows, fling a line, then drop to leeward, the huge steamship manœuvring so as to give her lee to the small craft.

Again he wiped the crimson froth off Padgham's lips.

As he watched the surviving hands one by one slip into the cork belt and drop clear of the vessel's side, down the line, to be hauled safely on board the lifeboat, memories and thoughts thronged on him in swift visions—appealing, rebuking, assuaging him.

The first officer, who had crawled along, yelled in his ear. He shouted in reply.

"Can't be done! He's dying. Rib pierced a lung or summat."

"Let—me—be——" the master pumped out, gurgling with his life's blood. "Save—yourselves, men."

Lowell, in his intensity, let slip an oath. He frowned at the blood-stained mouth.

"A slacker, you called me, but not this time, no! Before God, I am an Englishman!"

He thrust the officer away, and motioned toward the lifeboat.

"Jump, mate, jump, and save yourself. But, not me. He is my own mother's son."

In the searchlight's glare Lowell saw his step-brother's lips move, and straining his ears he bent closer.

"What—do—you—know, Dan?"

The words bubbled up indistinctly; and a cascade of

brine pouring shoulder deep athwart the deck washed the blood away.

“No more’n you know yourself, but couldn’t swear to ashore. The striker did hit first, then tried to knife you, and slipped,” was the reply; “and I set my mind on playing the doubt that d——d hard against you. I don’t know as even yet I’m at one with you. . . . But I’ll do all I can for you, even if it’s no more’n standing by. . . . Ay, Dicky, boy, with you. . . .”

A minute or so later the lifeboat, heaving and twisting on a bed of foam, pulled away out of the lee, and escaped the sinking bows.

THE VINDICATION OF BINSTED, EX-P.O.

LATE that Thursday night, on which Commander D. G. Kelsale, of H.M.S. *Boscawen*, then lying in the Medway, returned from leave, he called for letters at the well-known hotel which looks hospitably upon Sheerness Dockyard ; and, as he was turning indoors, encountered—Binsted !

He who had just a few days previously been publicly arraigned, not only by certain journals in England but by others elsewhere.

George Peter Binsted—now ex-petty officer.

“ Huh ! Binsted, you are a d——d fool, you ! ” snapped the commander, acknowledging his bluejacket’s salute, and pausing on the hotel steps. “ Why in the name of mischief didn’t you smash a messmate, not that foreigner ? ”

“ ’E called me a liar, sir ; ’e called me a liar, sir. ”

“ How did it happen, then ? ”

“ W’en I say to ’im the ’Umberstone Wireless ’ad been got at, ’e ups and calls me a liar before all the bar, sir. Calls me worse’n that. ’Im !—a foreigner ! ”

The officer muttered approvingly in undertone to himself as he eyed the seaman. He continued, not so brusquely :

“ So you threw your hand in, eh ? Then had a scuffle with the police pulling you off ? ”

“ Yes, sir. Next morning I got it ’ot from the joss at the Marlborough Police Court ; but nothing like what these M.P.’s ’ave been saying. ”

“ Huh ! ” grunted the superior officer in disgust, “ a

big noise over it, at any rate ! Looks as if many folks on shore still take the Navy for a drunken rapscaillon lot. You ought to have kept your hands down, Binsted."

Inquisitively the keen eyes of Kelsale had roved along the crowded street of Blue Town, where all was stir and excitement in anticipation of hostilities. Inquisitively, too, did they glance at the chug-g-ing taxi-cab—drawn up alongside the kerb at the street corner near by, awaiting its hire, who evidently was inside the hotel.

They came back to the lithe, smart seaman standing on the pavement.

"There'll be some more of their spies knocking around at present," said the commander ; "that's as certain as the Parliamentary Secretary didn't know he was telling a lie when he gave the denial in the Commons about the Humberstone espionage. Disrating you to a leading seaman for that row with the foreigner has made you suffer too heavily for the public's excitement."

"The Deutscher called me a liar, sir," exclaimed Binsted bitterly, in the voice of one conversing with an old and respected officer. "I don't take that from any foreigner, when I'm speaking God's truth."

"I wouldn't, I wouldn't, myself," was the reply, as the commander buttoned his coat, for the fog coming off the North Sea struck chilly.

"There'll be a thundering big surprise, yet, out of this affair," he added, "that's as plain as a pikestaff ! But it's neither your business, nor mine. Step along to the Dockyard station, and hurry 'em up with my gear, will you ; I want to be on board as soon as possible. . . . Thanks, Binsted !"

As the officer turned to enter the hotel someone rushing down the steps brushed him aside. Grabbing hold of the rail to keep his footing, Kelsale shot an angry look at the hurrying civilian.

". . . Your pardon, sir," reached his ear in strident accents.

But the commander's eye had fled from the heavy Saxon face with its grey eyes and stubbly yellowish moustache to the bluejacket on the pavement.

Binsted had started forward in a truculent manner, his arms still by his sides—his hands knotted.

With very visible effort he was trying to restrain himself.

"You again! . . . You!" he blurted under his breath. "You that downed me. You scab!"

Self-control breaking, Binsted flung himself at him. But with averted face the foreigner ran forward, and leaped into the taxi-cab, that instantly turned sharp away at a great pace towards Queensborough.

"Binsted! Steady, there. Steady, my lad," thundered Kelsale, jumping down the steps, to seize the seaman by the left shoulder. "No nonsense! D'you hear?"

"It's 'im, sir, it's 'im," came the sullen answer as the bluejacket halted in a reluctant fashion on feeling the officer's grip; "I don't forget 'is face!"

"Him! What the deuce is he doing here? . . . Carry on with my gear, and smartly."

With a puzzled face Kelsale entered the hotel. More pronounced than ever appeared to him the injustice of wreaking on Binsted the anger of a noisy 'Peace' section of the Party in power at the increasing hostile demonstrations by the populace, inflamed with rumours of espionage by the Continental Power.

Deep in thought, Commander Kelsale took his letters out of the rack, and passed down the short passage to the "Fountain's" smoke-room. Finding it deserted, he paused by the door in indecision. But, on catching sight of a cigar-case lying on the mantel-piece, he stepped forward and looked at it.

Prompted by curiosity, he shoved aside the 'Bradshaw' and the recently used liqueur-glasses beside it. Seeing no tokens of ownership on its blue morocco

exterior, he opened the case, and regarded the diverse assortment of cigars with the eye of a connoisseur.

Carelessly he withdrew one, and holding it to his nostrils inhaled with pleasure the delicious odour of the Havana leaf. Of a sudden, surprise—conjecture, sharp and sinister—contracted his low broad forehead. His black eyes narrowed. Lifting the brown cube closer, he scrutinized it very shrewdly.

Delicately he rolled the Carvajal betwixt finger and thumb.

Again he did so. An exclamation broke from him.

“Odd!” he muttered. “D——d odd—that!”

There came on his ear the long-drawn whirl of a full-power automobile drawing up abruptly before the hotel, and then voices approaching quickly from the hall.

He replaced the cigar, with a gesture of annoyance. For a second he swithered, then thrust the case into his side pocket.

Woolfner and the waiter precipitated themselves into the smoke-room. The foreigner leaped to the mantel-piece. He flashed a look of consternation along it.

“I did leave it hier,” he cried in a harsh, perturbed voice. “Mein Gott, it is gone. I did leave it hier in my haste to catch the packet.”

“You couldn’t ’ave left it, sir,” asserted the waiter confidently, shifting about the ornaments and removing the liqueur-glasses. “Nobody bin in this room since you went hout but this gen’leman here. . . . You ’aven’t seen a cigar-case lyin’ about, sir?”

“No! No cigar-case, except the one I have in my pocket,” returned the commander meaningly.

His eyes and Woolfner’s met, challenging and peremptory.

The bearing of the British officer did not suggest any misgivings. He appeared imperturbable in expression, though he was conscious that his face reddened a little under the accusing gaze of the stranger.

The latter stepped forward impetuously as if to search him—wrench away his property. He devoured him with fierce eyes.

“You have stolen it, and it is in your pocket, Herr Officer. Gott, I know it is,” he snarled. “Give it back to me.”

“Give it back to you. Call a police officer, and have me searched,” grunted Kelsale; “I’d be glad to see him. I have no other cigar-case except the one in my pocket—but I don’t mind risking my character on it. Ring up the police, waiter, for Inspector Barnett to step smartly along.”

His accuser regained self-control.

He took a long breath. A shadow crept into the corner of his hard grey eyes. Yet with insolence and effrontery crowding them he gazed at the commander.

“Ring up the police!” he jibed in hardihood, giving a short ironical laugh as he turned to the dumbfounded attendant. “Ring up the police to take in charge this thieving Englishman. But, meantime,” he added vindictively, “I call a constable from the street.”

The next instant he was dashing up the passage.

Unhesitatingly Kelsale doubled after him. But fouling the waiter by the door he fell on his side, and as he recovered himself heard the taxi-cab making rapidly away.

“Jump along there, waiter!” he snorted, “ring up Inspector Barnett to come along at once. Jump along there—I’m waiting.”

He hurried back into the smoke-room, turned up the Welsbach over the near table, and extracted one of the cigars. In the flood of strong white light he more plainly detected the peculiar ring beneath the wide gilt band encircling the Carvajal, near its centre.

Dexterously he ripped asunder the band with the tip of his fore-finger nail, and with an exclamation of expectancy removed the ring of rice-paper which had

been slipped under it. For a few seconds he scrutinized the hieroglyphic markings, then investigated the remaining cigars, and from each obtained similar results.

He pounced on one of the slips, and held it close to the light, almost on a level with his eyes. Intently he examined it.

"By heavens, I am right!" he ejaculated under his breath as he peered at the faint pencillings. ". . . More of their underhand work, whatever it refers to. D——n them!"

Some minutes later Inspector Barnett of the Dockyard Metropolitan Police was nodding his bald head in conspicuous wisdom.

"This is a haul, sir," said he to Kelsale, as they bent over the table in examination of the small strips. "I shall at once send out the telephone call for the foreigner's arrest, and a report in to Head-quarters. He is of medium height, I understand you to say, grey eyes, and stubbly moustache. But did you notice no distinguishing—no identity—marks, sir?"

The commander shook his head.

"No! Not in my hurry. Sorry," he jerked out reluctantly. "I don't——"

But a stark silence had fallen on the thronged street outside, and the words died on his tongue.

For the moment the two men looked at each other in profound amazement. Then Kelsale, hearing Binsted's voice in the passage, sprang to the door and flung it open.

The bluejacket brought up before him, flushed and panting.

"What is it?"

The officer's voice cut like a whip into the stillness. It was lost in a burst of deep huzzaing, that, strange and menacing, rolled from end to end of the Dockyard Town.

"'Mobilize,' sir," exulted the ex-petty officer, husky with excitement. "I thought, you'd like to hear at

once. 'All sea-going vessels to ship full war stores, and liberty men to embark at once.' I have got your gear outside, sir."

"Good!" replied the commander, with most admirable sang-froid just as if death-and-life hostilities are an hourly occurrence in the British Navy, "very good! We can't go too soon at 'em now, hammer-and-tongs. Take my things to the jetty; I'll be down in two jiffeys. . . . Binsted, did you notice any special marks on that foreigner?"

The bluejacket's perspiring face reflected satisfaction, that stamped his features with a certain grim malignity.

"A ring wot I wore w'en P.O., sir, ripped open 'is left cheek just alongside the ear, w'en I struck 'im for lifting 'is 'and to me. 'E 'as a strip of sticking plaster on it now."

"Thanks! The police want him for a little affair. It may indirectly go to clear you. . . . Can't say any more at present, Binsted."

Not for a few days was the ex-petty officer to find his vindication, though history was on the point of carving that niche for him, towards which his pugnacity, inflamed by the fever of his hatred, was irresistibly impelling him. And the news imparted him on Saturday at noon, when he was called forward to the commander, brought to a head that recklessness which bore him so far to his vindication and triumph.

"About that foreigner of yours, Binsted," said Commander Kelsale as the seaman saluted, "as well to let you know the police were just too late; he slipped away on board the Dutch packet for Flushing. Humph! . . . Nothing less than the M.P.'s, who stuck up for you, getting back into office, can raise hopes of your case being reconsidered. . . . Something like the beetle that's up against God Almighty—that's what you are! It must sing dumb; and so must you! . . . Carry on. . . ."

The eagerness had faded from Binsted's face ; and the glow from his blue eyes.

" I ain't going to be called a liar, sir ! I never 'ave been."

There was the accent of suffering, not of assertion, in his low voice. Over his features crept a bitter, unreasoning look, that emphasized the obstinacy of his narrow, square chin and heavy lips.

Kelsale recognized that here was a man who put his self-esteem and good name above life itself. A desperate adventurer for vindication of his character.

" An unfortunate affair ! " the ' Bloke ' snapped testily. " You had no right to meddle with the foreigner, and these shrieking demagogues in Parliament no right to meddle with you and naval discipline. Don't you chew it too much, my man ! You do yourself harm."

Kelsale, frowning to himself, shook his head as the bluejacket trailed aft for the mess-deck. But suddenly both officer and man squinted at the Nore Signal Station across the Medway to starboard, then at signal bridges springing into activity.

" That ex-P.O. seems to be correct, sir ! " remarked the commander some minutes later to the *Boscarwen's* captain as the latter handed back the signal slate.

Pursuant to instructions, then, the cruiser that afternoon found herself out on the North Sea as a unit in a widely strung and overlapping line testing the atmospherics.

But not till she was close on the Great Silver Pit, off the south end of the Dogger Bank, did the cackle, cackle, cackle in her wireless receiver cease continuity ; and communications became irregularly jammed ; thunderous sparks flashing between the antennæ.

The word flew along the decks. Groups of excited officers filled the flat near by for a few minutes, then dispersed for the open.

It was no ' long ranger ' that had opened out.

"Humberstone waves blocked again," said the C.O. in surprise to Kelsale as he stepped from starboard on his bleak, high bridge, where the molecules of fog bleared the eye and made everything wet and clammy. "Oh, damn this fog coming down again. Ouch! We'll stop this jamming, wherever it's coming from. It almost seems as if some folks have got inside our new transmitters."

"And only the Humberstone was fitted with them, sir," returned the commander cryptically, "though the other stations got them last week. At any rate, we're settling down to work."

Yes! But it was Binsted's work. He was become the prime factor.

Topmost of the lookouts, Binsted was perched on the upper mainyard. From this post a clearer view was obtainable through the thinner strata of fog.

The British cruisers were on the lookout for atmospherics in essential!

In the purview of Binstead's strained gaze the upper folds of haze drove together, or fell apart before the varying current of north-westerly wind, leaving momentary rifts and lanes, down which filtered the sunlight from overhead as if through ground-glass. Occasionally he saw the fog, that for the most was sea-face, also flatten out into a tableland as of cotton-wool, and, thrust through it all, the fore masthead and truck electric, with the vapour streaming away from it in a little spiral wake like smoke.

Driven by heavier gusts, the haze rolled down thicker like gauze, or fell away into sweeping concavities studded with illusionary peaks and bastions. More than once Binsted, almost deluded by some wraith-like prow of it looming forth, had with difficulty forbore hailing the sighting top below, to mark the phantom outline dissolve into the surging fog-scape.

In an eddy of the breeze there swirled up great volumes of gas and fine scorix belched out by the two unseen

funnels. Binsted clung desperately to his swaying perch, being almost overcome by the stifling fumes. Cursing vindictively, he held his breath and closed smarting eyes.

When he opened them a few seconds later the gusts had thinned the upper haze as though a wide lane were opening in it.

His heart jumped—at no mysterious snout looming out, but to the faint throb of aerial motors. Swiftly growing louder, it overpowered the faint pounding of the *Boscawen's* engines.

Binsted was aware of someone shinning up from the sighting top in answer to his hail. But he himself had drawn up his legs from under the yard and was standing on it, while he strained ears and eyes to their utmost in the direction of the fast-travelling sound.

There shot into his view the great hexagonal nose of an airship, that was steering west on a slant across the cruiser's track.

Even as the ex-P.O. picked out the dirigible amidst the further haze, she swooped down closer into the clearer air to secure foolhardy observation ; then, suddenly tilting her blunt prow with its truncated biplanes, soared upwards and past to the heightening clatter and hum of her motors.

Not the 'aerial' dangling from the car suspended forward, but sight of a face there—a strip of sticking-plaster close to the ear—set Binsted's brain on fire.

The torrent of his hatred dashed aside all common sense.

The cruiser rolled as the dirigible more rapidly slanted upwards and across her track ; and, in the oscillation to starboard, Binsted hurled himself through mid-air.

His was the sublimity of hatred in a savage who hurls himself, cursing, at the moon.

By a finger's breadth his outspread right hand caught hold of the port after-stay of the framework supporting the after car. He swung through space, the aluminium alloy bending to his weight.

Under it the airship suddenly heeled on her port quarter. Her mechanician, who had sprung to the side of the car, was tossed out with irresistible momentum. Head first he fell into the abyss of fog.

As the midshipman from the sighting-top hoisted himself on the upper yard he beheld this body, grotesque, awful, in its descent, and also a dim figure climbing monkey-like into the after car of the vanishing dirigible. The stark amazement in his hail to the Bridge found starker re-echo there.

Binsted, breathing heavily, drew up his knees, then slid forward on his stomach into the car, down into the narrow space alongside the motors.

Their hum roared in his ear. The power of thought was restored. His situation came home to him with terrible suddenness, but in the rebound of his pitiless hatred it was rendered devoid of sickening reaction.

He crawled out of the vicinity of the free escape valves that, discharging into the air at a safe distance some feet beneath the car, seemed to be vomiting constant flame. Unsteadily he rose to his feet.

His senses, though obsessed by his deadly purpose, were preternaturally keen and alert. A projecting stud in the framework of the car had torn a broad flesh wound in his left temple. He was as unconscious of any pain as of his gory cheek and chin.

On the airship jobbling through a cross-current from the southward, he grabbed the forward port stay by the gangway to keep his balance, and paused to regain his breath.

Out of the passage of oiled silk, stretched on a light framework between the two cars, the aviator stepped on to the few feet of after gangway—anger and consternation on his grey face.

“Schwartz!” he boomed above the motors’ throbbing, “wie——”

But even as amazement ridged his features Binsted’s right fist shot out, and the aviator went down like an ox

beneath the sledge-hammer. To the impetus of his tumble the dirigible heeled in her flight; his body slid over the narrow platform, and dangled head down; the blood dripping from nose and ear. But without backward look the bluejacket gained the covered gangway.

At its other end his eye caught sight of Woolfner in the fore car, outlined in the haze as he bent over the wireless apparatus that was sheltered by an oiled silk canopy.

An expression of fury contorted Binsted's face hideously.

The airship, delicately poised in her equilibrium, rocked erratically to his hasty steps. But he did not know.

Woolfner had unstrapped the wireless microphones from his cars, adjusted the forward equilibrator, and gesturing in wrath and irritation was coming aft.

Suddenly he halted in the passage as the bluejacket passed the window let in amidships. He stepped back—hunched his shoulders together as if the knife was already tickling his spinal column.

“In Gott's name! . . . You?”

The words whistled forth betwixt his clinched teeth. In his eyes was the look of one confronted with the Last Judgment.

The ex-P.O. leaped upon him in the fury of a madman.

Woolfner, startled out of self-control, jumped instinctively backward, lost his balance in the wild gyrating of the aerial craft, and crashed sideways through the flimsy wall to starboard. In a desperate grab to save himself he clutched the framework, but it tore asunder under his burden, and he fell out into mid-air.

His right ankle caught under one of the thin steel ribs of the main superstructure, and he swung about head down, his arms working wildly. Crazy he tried to reach the understays. But the balloon-ship reeled to his mad plungings. Harsh, guttural cries of despair rasped from him.

Above, Binsted leered through the wreckage, evil swelling on his face.

"Yah ! . . . Come to y'r proper end, Mister Woolfner," he jeered triumphantly, excitement flexing his hoarse tones. "You that downed me. You don't jam our wireless any more, you don't ; I'm 'eaving you off."

He leant down and thrust out his hand to hurl Woolfner outward. But as his fingers touched the imprisoned ankle, he paused, and stared into the grey void beneath. Like some sound of strange far-off life the faint droning of a syren had taken his trained ear.

"That's us," he grunted. "Oh, h——l ! Drowning's too good for this d——d spy."

He twitched Woolfner's ankle free, but ere he could release his fingers the great sausage-shaped envelope overhead, caught in an oblique wind current, was thrust down aslant on its port beam. Cat-like, Binsted clung with hand and feet to escape being thrown through the wreckage, and with his knees and left hand stubbornly held up Woolfner by his limb. Almost instantly *Kundschafter Zwei* recovered her trim.

"Englischer, you have saved my life," panted the Continental, when a few seconds later he lay safe on the deck of the covered gangway, his face ghastly livid ; "I shall never forget you."

"Think so ! I ain't finished with you," the seaman rasped savagely, instantly pinioning his arms with the slack of a handline. "Dead or alive, it's you I'm having."

"Not finished with me ?" snarled Woolfner, struggling impotently against his bonds.

The bluejacket gave no reply. Only a sound, brutal, inhuman, passed his lips.

Woolfner eyed him agonisedly as from the bosom of his jumper he withdrew his jack-knife. Sweat beaded the spy's face. His nostrils stood out and quivered.

His whole being rose in revolt at such an abominable death.

"Mein Gott—this !—you have me saved for this ?" he

cried passionately, his voice rising into a shriek shriller than the motors' hum. . . . "All the information I did get at the Humberstone Station your officer does find. . . . I do work from my memory—and you come from where the devil knows—und alles ist ganz verloren. You save my life—it is but to butcher me. . . . Rufe ich, mein Gott, zu dir."

With implacable countenance the bluejacket shifted the jack-knife to his right hand.

In an obsession of hatred he bent over him.

Through the fog, now piling downward in great obscure clouds, a syren again hooted wearily, weirdly, others answering near and afar.

The sounds of 'us' struck more than the tympanum of Binsted's ear. They struck the chords of that higher and inner manhood, strenuous and generous, which mounts as a life-artery in the men of the British Navy.

A convulsive movement shook the bluejacket. His inflamed face twitched like an epileptic's.

In a stupor of conflicting emotions Woolfner saw him climb the stays up to the great envelope. There came sounds of ripping, of rending cover, and the hiss of escaping gas.

The airship sank slowly by her prow.

When just on sundown the *Boscawen* picked up her seaman—even as she and consorts were abandoning the seeming hopeless search—he was clinging to the balloon's after tip, which, supported by its gas-cells, was floating intact.

Lashed to him was the Humberstone spy.

THE CIRCUMVENTING OF THE DEUTSCHERS

THE master of the *Happy Ann* vindictively slapped the arrestment writ against the companion.

“Just think of them ketchin’ us as we were movin’ out!” exclaimed her first officer, pausing also at the top of the cuddy steps. “They must have made the wires ’um between this ’ere mud-’ole and Kiel since last night. There ain’t any ’elp for it, sir!”

“Help! . . . Awkward enough being mulcted in damages for stoving in their garrison launch’s bows, when we were not responsible for the collision; but, what about Christmas? Christmas—here! Ye’re right, Bykeet! . . . A mud-hole, nothing more!”

“Christmas—three days on from now, sir!” groaned the lugubrious first officer. “But there ain’t any ’elp for it!”

“Oh, d——n you and your yelp of ’elp—’elp. Why couldn’t you have kept your eyes about you as we came in. I’ve got only two in my head.”

With his eyes resting on the North Frisian port, into which stress of heavy weather had driven the steamer, Captain Bull turned amidships.

The *Happy Ann* was lying chockablock alongside the north pier, steam up and her decks cleared for sea. Her forecastle, standing in groups, sheltered by the funnel casing from the piercing north-easter, were throwing dark looks at the natives and the ‘poliz-officiern’ who were guarding the shoreward end of the gangway, having a few minutes ago brought the vessel’s departure to an

abrupt and unpleasant conclusion. Aft, a maritime guard, rifle on his shoulder, was in possession.

In the grey light of the winter afternoon the town looked very bleak and comfortless against the wind-swept sandhills sheltering it in a kind of acute elbow. Along the esplanade facing the harbour, great white hotels with shuttered windows, a deserted public garden commanded by a gorgeous casino, its porticoes and windows boarded like the numerous kiosques and cafés against the winter's gales, lay patiently awaiting the crowds of summer visitors.

"By thunders!" growled Captain Bull, as he stepped on his bridge, "to spend Christmas—here!—munching black brot and horseflesh sausages, gobbling sauer-kraut and wurst, and swilling lager. Lord, and me promised the missis and kiddies to be home for plum-pudding and turkey and pie and rum-punch and roast figs and chest-nuts. Ugh! . . . Here's a pretty pass, eh, Mister Robinson?"

The second mate, who with elbows propped on the after bridge-rail had been staring through his glass away N.N.W., into the thick offing beyond the north end of the island, handed the binoculars to the skipper.

"A sailing craft standing for port. By George, sir, aren't the Deutschers watching us!"

Bull nodded and took the binoculars, but directed them on the gunboat moored in the roadstead outside the tidal harbour. On board her were no signs of life except the officer on her bridge, a sentry pacing up and down by the forecastle gangway, and the wisp of drab smoke eddying from her broad, stumpy funnel.

"This galliot coming in will be the powder craft the harbour-master was jabbering about this morning, sir," continued the second mate. "Harbour-master making for the gangway."

"We've got to shift to the south pier, I understand. The powder ketch lies in this berth."

“What about getting across, sir—winching?”

Just then on the master swinging round to greet the vociferous ‘hafenmeister’ his eyes met Robinson’s. They looked at each other interrogatively.

“Glad to see, Robinson, you’re no croaking Cockney, like Mr. Bykeet. By thunders! I’d like to let these Germans see we’re the Old Blood yet.”

“... What? You know not what I to you say? To die sud pier, I tell you; die same berth to take. I take you kreutzweise myself, under your steam; it is da. Then you will fires to draw, and in die schiff to remain. You are arrestanten.”

“What? Arrested along with the vessel—me?” Bull boomed, staring down at the harbour-master, a sallow, wizen-faced Frisian giant, beetle-browed, with a bushy moustache, and a bayonet-cut across the bridge of his broad nose. “What wrong have I done?—that launch shouldn’t have been where she was! . . . Some of your hands slip the wires, then, and we’ll haul aboard for t’other berth.”

As the harbour-master passed to the gangway Captain Bull turned to engine-room telegraph and wheel, swiftly, decisively. His low voice reached Robinson’s ear, and the officer started in amazement at him, the following second to dart to the ladder and make forward to the hands.

Hawk-like, Bull cast an eye at the pier hands slouching up to the great cast-steel bollards; behind them the background of sheds, offices, and other fixings, a motor wagon punting along bringing up men from the garrison to help unload the powder ship; a crowd of fishermen and other idlers lining the further parapet. It came to the skipper that witnesses would not be lacking.

A kicking capstan slacked the wires, and ashore they were slipped over the bollards. Before the harbour-master and his hands could believe their sight, the great steel hawsers were being ravenously nipped on board, their ends falling into the water with a heavy splash.

"Danke! danke! meine Herren," roared Captain Bull, as he jammed his engine-room telegraph over; "I am shifting, but it's to t'other side of the North Sea. You don't catch this Britisher doing Christmas with you——"

The crash of the maritime guard's rifle as he realised affairs cut short the skipper's words.

The bullet struck the funnel with a sharp ping, and Bull's face winched. Hunching himself together as if lessening the target of his tall figure he bent low over the wheel, bringing the *Happy Ann* round sharp on her heel for the open.

Yells and oaths broke out on the deck behind him, where the boatswain and two seamen were in grips with the guard. Above the hubbub on the pier he heard the second mate drawing attention to the harbour-master, who in desperation and fury had jumped from the pier-head and landed almost at cost of his life on the runaway's port quarter. Strange and guttural expletives hurtled through the air. Heads, arms, and legs wriggled and heaved in the mêlée. Robinson crawled out, undermost of the scrum, his right eye bunged up and nose dripping.

"Shove 'em into the fo'c'sle, and secure," bawled the skipper, exultation swelling his voice.

As he laid the steamer on a course for the red and black buoys marking the seaward channel, he eyed with trepidation the gunboat in the roadstead ahead. Her bridge semaphore was energetically answering the pier's signals, and officers now thronged her bridge. Bluejackets were swarming up forward. Amidships, a cutter was being quickly got away.

"Madness, madness! Twelvemonths' quod for the 'ands, five years for the officers, and the vessel confiscated," groaned the first officer, who had climbed to the bridge. "'Ow bloomin' smart that 'ere Kaiser craft is—jumpin' round aboard, slicker'n fleas! There ain't any comin' over them Deutschers, sir."

"I'll d——d well come over you!" exploded the skipper, devouring the *Bremse* with nervous eyes as he handed over the wheel.

Telescope levelled, he craned himself over the starboard bridge-rail and watched her. A grin of contempt and scorn corrugated his high-cheeked features. He slapped the telescope home.

"Belayed their cutter," he grunted, "I'm safe. Queer they've no stomach for this job, though!"

"There ain't any comin' over them Deutschers!" persisted Bykeet. "Wot's this ahead to port, sir?"

"Oh, h——l! A warship!" rumbled Captain Bull in his beard. "They'll be wirelesslying her. . . . This dirty weather coming down with the drift has sent her in to pick up her ground moorings. Oh, blast her!"

"Soon be thicker outside, sir, she's bringing the fog and snow along astern," commented Robinson, in an interval between snuffling and wiping his gory nose.

But Captain Bull, gloomily viewing the cruiser coming up the fairway, gave no reply.

Peremptorily the *Gazelle* arrested the *Happy Ann*. As the two vessels lost way the Britisher's hands lined the forward deck rail and regarded her very glumly. Yet the skipper had regained somewhat of his elasticity of spirit.

"Mr. Robinson, ask that band-box looking cratur on her fore-bridge what the deuce he means."

"Sieh da!" bawled the German C.O., standing to starboard, apart from his officers. "Was I do want? Potz tausend, you are cool, you Englischer. You die law have escaped. You are now my arrestanten. You have two men seized. I send a boat over."

Flakes of snow stung Captain Bull's face; yet, though its grimness deepened, all gloom fled away. Warily, anxiously, he looked around; critically sniffed the thickening air, noted the wind was freshening; and addressed some short, curt words to his officers.

"Yes, sirs, I'm taking all the chances in this game," he wound up with very drily. "Neck or nothing, or my name is not John Bull!"

Drunkenly the steamer swayed from port to starboard and back again, lurching and rolling. On the *Happy Ann* making a very ponderous sally in entente cordiale at the *Gazelle's* port shoulder, a smile of gratification spread over the skipper's face.

"Achtung! Achtung! Potz tausend——where do you come?" roared the Deutscher's commander. "Vorwärts, da. Get out die way or you will into us run—collide. Sieh da!"

Bull peered beneath his hand at the nearing whaler, then glanced again at the snowshot drift coming down, impenetrable to the eye. Softly he chuckled on hearing the slow thumping of his engines.

"There ain't no pickin' up the seaward gat, sir, in this muck," said Bykeet in a sepulchral, warning voice. "Jus' makin' bad worse, that's wot I say."

"You hold your gab, you bargemaster!" snapped Bull, making for the bridge ladder. "Mind my orders now."

As the steamer dipped, the whaler's bow-men made a grab with their boathooks at her. One caught on the Jacob's ladder just as the *Happy Ann*, now distant some cables from the cruiser, rolled ponderously to port, and the seaman was hoisted off his feet. Frantically he yelled out while his mates forward in the whaler hung desperately to his nether extremities. It was just then the second officer saw his captain's hand go up, and rang the engines 'Slow Ahead.'

"Der teufel! Ring die engines off. I tell you, ring die engines off. You will us schwamp."

Monkey-like the lieutenant had jerked himself on to the ladder.

"Cast off, then," replied Captain Bull, who was standing on the upper rungs, contemplating him, a grin on his

dark face, "cast off, my son. Who the deuce asks you aboard?"

"Do you not hear? Ring die engines off, or I will make——" But a gush of brine rending up the vessel's side filled his mouth.

"Cast off, Herr Officier, cast off. The fog is swallowing you fast. There's your Old Man tootling."

The wrathful eyes of Seiner Deutscher Majestät's officer ate up the Britisher.

"Get off die ladder," roared he, laboriously ascending. "You schwimm—bei G——t, you schwimm."

"Schwimm yourself!" roared the skipper, reaching down to catch him under the right armpit with his free hand and throw him wide.

A chorus of surprise and anger went up from the whaler that instantly dropped astern to pick up the lieutenant. At full speed ahead the *Happy Ann* charged through the wintry elements, out into the North Sea, the fog-bells on the jobbling buoys to port and starboard guiding her. Astern, the cruiser's syren droned forth mingling with the *Bremse's* fainter hooting. With every faculty strung alert Captain Bull was making homeward.

When the second mate came on watch at eight bells, he marked the captain standing in the lee of the charthouse. The log-desk light gleaming through the snow-flecked window dimly showed his worried face.

"The harbour-master and t'other are keen to know what you intend doing with 'em, sir," he observed. "The guard wants to skip, 'cause it'll be black munchoo and skilly for letting the steamer skidoo; and the harbour-master is in the deuce of a stew! Seems he is responsible for the Daimler getting her nose stove in. Clean forgot she was tied up there till we ran smash on her. He don't mind if he never gets back. They'll be cruel severe on him."

The long laugh of an eased mind escaped Captain Bull. He rubbed a circle in the snow clogging the charthouse

window, and peered inside at the clock alongside the desk-log, where the first officer was writing up his watch.

Said he in a voice, the cheerfulness of which the pitiless fog and snow could not dispel :

“ I was bothered a bit 'bout them. Well, this hour three nights on, Mr. Robinson, 'll see these two Deutschers sitting in my front parlour with my missis and me, supping rum-punch and eating pies. Oh, I ain't had any grudge against them—not I ! They were only doing their duty, according to their parts—that was all. . . . I say, Mr. Robinson—we seem to have a drop of the Old Blood yet ! ”

THE SEAL OF HIS MANHOOD

UNEASILY the submarine washed through the lifting waters. But as if unaware of the growing seas Captain Aynscombe gazed ahead to starboard, where Foulness Island, flat as a pancake, was rising against the grey horizon.

"Something of a smother of water getting up, sir," remarked Lieutenant Innes, turning to him.

Without shifting his eyes, the superior officer snapped :

"Just what is wanted to test her surface running. More of a tumble than this !"

Not the reply, but its browbeating tone arrested the lieutenant's attention ; and he speculated as to what had brought the change in his cousin. Only in the last few hours had he found his attitude to be prickly and constrained.

"Everything on board running sweet and true," reflected Innes. "I wonder if that message had really anything to do with him."

And again he tried to recall it, but again in vain.

The lieutenant could all too easily bring up in memory the beautiful mobile face of his childhood's playmate as, lingering a little behind her house party, she had whispered to him on the Carringtons' hall-steps.

He could remember, too, that Aynscombe glanced at them from the vestibule as he slipped on his overcoat. But in respect to Isabel's words Lieutenant Innes ransacked memory in vain. He could only bethink himself of the affection lambent in her earnest blue eyes.

No, Bell had not changed. That was all he could recollect of the snatched little colloquy.

"She can turn any man's head—heart, too," was his comment.

Just then the submarine lurched steep on a hollow dipping from under her, and Captain Aynscombe, taken off guard, was sent headlong to port. As his desperate hand missed the lifeline Innes made a grab at his arm.

"Thanks!"

Something of the old cordiality was in his cousin's voice. Aynscombe shot a grateful look at him, regaining his footing on the dwarf deck of the conning-tower.

"A near thing!" remarked the lieutenant, nodding where only a few feet below the waters were swirling and clawing along the smooth, French-grey hull.

"A common risk on board such craft," the senior officer jerked out.

Curtness had again invaded his voice and demeanour. He looked to port at the special service vessel accompanying them.

As a sentient thing, whose heart pulses against buffeting forces, the submarine with a curious thrashing sound slipped onward, driving through the shallow knolls of sea, and leaving a very short yeasty wake. When the swell took her she heaved and heeled precipitately, and now and again the green water gushed and eddied on her deck, dashing about the feet of the look-out. Tiny jets of bluish vapour spurted where the parted sea met again on her quarter, and from the exhaust came the smell of petrol fumes.

Sharp, acrid, they impinged on Aynscombe's nostrils, and he held his breath.

In his turmoiled mind, the smell, together with the rapid, rhythmic panting of the motors, brought into vehement activity the sense of revolt now assailing him anent his lot in life. For the first time the salt tang in

the flurry of wind searching around educed no feelings of strength, of mastery, and well-being.

The senior officer was stridently out of tune with his universe.

It came to him—even as it had come on the previous night at the Carringtons' dance—that his cousin again stood in his path.

Not only his financial fortune but now his personal happiness as well had Innes intercepted. Ah, if he only had asked Isabel months ago, before George on being appointed to the flotilla had renewed the old intimacy. Then—ah, then?

To Aynscombe the thought was maddening.

Was the younger always to filch from him his life-set prizes?

Out of the corner of his eye the senior glimpsed the submarine's C.O., who had been smitten by a spray rending against the conning-tower structure, wipe the brine off his brown face with the flat of his hand, and throw an anxious look up-wind and at the rising seas. Carefully the lieutenant conned the underwater craft to escape a wreathing swell, lest in its tumble home a crown of water might drop through the conning-tower hatchway, left open while the vessel was running on the surface or her motors would very speedily have exhausted the inside air.

"It is still freshening, sir," he cried, gesturing with his right hand round the horizon, against which the mother ship, though only a few cables abeam, appeared almost chockablock.

"No 'down-decks' yet. We'll keep running on top, and see how she does. What d'ye think I'm on board for?"

But even as the officer uttered these words in a guttural voice it occurred to him that had another been in command he would not have been on board.

Inwardly Captain Aynscombe vowed that he was in execution of his duties.

Further, he durst not question himself.

The voice of upright manhood, nourished by clean naval traditions, forbade inquiry. Yet he could not but acknowledge that with any other craft in his flotilla he would have left the report to the officer in command.

Not that he would take his cousin at any disadvantage—no, not that. Nothing discreditable!—not even the suggestion of it!—so he averred.

Lieutenant Innes was being treated like any other junior in the flotilla, was getting the full measure of fair play. But, if occasion did arise, the senior would see to it that the official heel squelched into the junior, and he was shifted to another billet.

‘Out of sight, out of mind.’

As Aynscombe looked forward, watching the hydroplanes take the wash from the bows, upon his hard-set, commanding features now livid with the biting wind, implacable hatred rose in a frown. The thin lips of his hard mouth tautened into a bow as if his ebullition of feeling almost outwent control. The impassioned energies of his strong will, that had gone so far to make his naval *carrière* phenomenally rapid, all were concentrated on clearing the way to attain his heart’s desire.

‘I cannot—I cannot, now—George . . . to-night. . . .’

Miss Carmaine’s almost inaudible words rang in Aynscombe’s memory like the minute guns of his doom.

Not on her was the blame, but on Innes—Innes, who had usurped his place with Uncle James as well. It was hard to lose the great fortune; but to lose Isabel—

He told himself there was no mistaking the meaning of her reply, nor could he misinterpret her agitation which she had suppressed with difficulty as her next partner entering the palm bower came up to claim his dance. Ardent white shoulders, rose-flushed face above a heaving bosom, eyes downcast, averted—all became visualised—

to be succeeded by that intimate group of two upon the hall-steps, reinforcing the death-blow to those hopes on which he had built so much.

Trees and houses on Foulness were now taking outline. Through a rift in the low-riding drift right ahead there shot a shaft of sunshine, and into liquid silver were resolved the waters, that showed elsewhere in a leaden grey specked here and there with frothing hummocks.

Critically Captain Aynscombe weighed the rough weather coming down. Critically he regarded his cousin's handling of the great underwater craft, that was labouring as if struggling fish-like to gain the calm below.

"A job to ditch him. He does her well," the Captain admitted to himself grudgingly, rancorously. "D——n him, why can't he lose his sea legs like me?"

Among the choppy waters there broke down a curling lip that deluged the ridge of deck. It surged about the drenched look-out, and whipped with its feathering brine the officers on the superstructure, a trifle forward of amidships.

"Not just summer weather, sir," cried Innes, clearing the salt out of his eyes.

"Soon be freezing. We'll 'down decks' in a minute or two . . . no, not signal the *Magnet* just yet that we'll be diving. . . . Innes! With that money left you, you are a fool to stick this. All work and no play in the Navy, now."

The lieutenant gestured in cheerful dissent.

"I don't mind it any more than you do, sir," he returned. "Though it is something of a decided change from my comforts and joys last night!"

Perhaps it was the lurid revelation in Aynscombe's eyes that coming in a shock of stark amazement caused Innes to relax his attention and poise of body. But to the submarine's abrupt jiggling he was catapulted to star-board. As head-first he clawed madly at lifeline and

slippery steel, a lip of water rose up and sucked him from the swelling side.

Captain Aynscombe shouted orders down the voice-tube, and, dexterously manœuvring the slowing submarine, cast a line to the struggling officer. But upon him thoughts raced in succession.

"Stand fast, stand fast!" he thundered to the look-out on the point of leaping overboard. "Not two lives!"

On marking his cousin had failed to catch the line, a stern joy rioted within him. With just the same iron determination had he advanced in his career.

Isabel rushed into his mental purview. But not as he would have had it. That gay, debonair being of light and gladness stricken with grief: her young life wounded at its root, her lamp of love darkened. Such was the end he saw himself obtaining.

In the twinkling of an eye Aynscombe's whole scheme of life was altered.

As he struck out for where his cousin was trying to keep afloat the iciness in the water pierced him; and the thought took him that Isabel most possibly would see neither of them alive. At any rate, she would know he had taken the true seaman's death, for a shipmate's sake—the death he himself had been saved from, just a little earlier.

Another twist of water submerged the captain, and gasping and half-blinded, he found himself again at the surface. Then with a wild snatch he gripped Innes by the left shoulder as the lieutenant was going under anew.

"Steady, George, they'll pick us up," he shouted, as if Innes was five hundred yards away. "Keep on——"

But the drowning man sank like a deadweight, dragging him under.

Aynscombe kicked out for the top, but could not reach it. A thousand noises roared in his head. It seemed to him that he was being suffocated, crushed to pieces.

Frantically, deadly, wrestled Innes in his obsession for life. Even as the captain held the more tenaciously to him, his cousin's hands sought his throat and his legs entwined his right limb.

Desperately Aynscombe tried to reach the surface.

He felt his cousin's resistance lessen of a sudden. But in the veins of his own eyes a million of dazzling coloured lights zigzagged, and agonies shot through him as if a gigantic vice were squeezing his chest.

Life screamed to him to wrench—batter Innes aside.

Something hit Aynscombe on the head, and his free hand caught on wood, which it gripped with the grip of the drowning. The next moment the bowman of the *Magnet's* whaler with a boathook had him fast under the left armpit as he held to the oar.

"I?—I did very little to save you, but you almost lost your life in rescuing me, Jack," was the lieutenant's rejoinder to Captain Aynscombe, as, next morning, he stood in his cousin's quarters. "I suppose you also have had a letter by this mail from Uncle Jim's Melbourne solicitors. Our first news was all wrong, then! All the 'geld' and the estate up-country are to go to the one of us who'll join the Commonwealth Naval Force, subject to the Admiralty's approval. Well, I shan't! My heart is at home."

"Don't be a fool, George. You marry Miss Carmaine, and shift Australia-way," returned Aynscombe brusquely, for abnegation had not salved his wound. "I have seen what is coming, and wish you both every happiness under the sun."

Innes looked at him, nonplussed. His brows wrinkled as recollection came back.

"I don't know about that," said he very slowly. "The other night, on the Carringtons' hall-steps, she gave me an odd message for you—I'm awfully sorry I forgot it till this minute—something in your voice brought it back to me. She told me to say—I hope you understand,

for she's always talking nonsense—that the answer you can take to be your own.”

Innes could not comprehend why his cousin's face went ghastly white, nor why he wrung his hand with such inexplicable intensity.

PREY OF A GREAT SPOIL

THE first officer took his eyes off the nearing boat, and glanced at the food-carrier's captain as he approached from the charthouse, the vessel having slowed to pick up her pilot.

"Second mate is aboard her, sir."

"He has just saved his ticket, then! Knew to the minute, he did, when she was to cast off—asked me yesterday. What the mischief does he mean by this Jack Shalloo trick?"

"It goes deeper than slackness!" asserted the bull-necked mate with significance.

"Eh, what? You still think it was him you saw?"

"I do, sir."

"Well, I don't, I don't. You are like the green hand, Macreay, that at first sees danger in everything—not including, though, the rope's end. He knows that later!"

"Very little against any of them till their ill work tells, sir. It's——" But the first officer of the *England* checked himself.

The white awning screened the scorching rays of Victoria's January sun from the bridge, yet Macreay pulled the deep peak of his cap over his eyes. His face, he deemed, showed what might be construed by his rather sarcastic officer as a "touch of nerves"—perhaps, vindictiveness.

Sighting a large foreign steamer coming smartly downstream, he grimaced expressively.

Captain Doddington had switched his mild blue eyes at Williamstown to port—where gangs of soft-hatted

Victorians were energetically lightering cargo from several ocean-going steamers now in haste to make their port of destination—then at the cat-boat and the pilot craft beyond.

"These warships, that all the excitement is about, if they ever do come on the scene," said Doddington in easy confidence, "none of them can stand up to any of ours. They'll shake themselves to pieces, firing. I'll dodge them all right—if they are there. It would have entailed more than an extra handful of work and worry if we sailed short of an officer. Eh, Macreay?"

"I for one 'ud as soon have that as not!"

Doddington eyed him in surprise.

"You're fond of double-duty!" he drawled acridly. "What's hitting you—that notion?"

"It isn't a notion, sir," Macreay replied stubbornly. "Here comes the foreigner, dropping down-stream."

"Well, well, doesn't she look very formidable!" rejoined the skipper somewhat sharply, his easy nature irritated by the first officer's insistence on danger. "But what the deuce is she rigging on her fore-castle—aft, as well? Some air-shaft foolerising! Don't you worry about Calhouse. What's stowed in Number Two Hold? Isn't it antimony for all anyone knows to the contrary?"

Macreay gave an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders.

"What if he does begin his name with a 'K' when he runs home east of the North Sea, and puts 'a' instead of 'o' amidships, and ships 'n' aft. That's his own business—and it doesn't affect this grub-stake of Old England's. Pooh, one Englishman good for three of his like! No danger from him."

"Pilot soon be aboard, sir. Here comes Calhouse alongside."

"Lucky we're before the foreigner, eh, Macreay! Standing a trifle close, isn't she? . . . Hey! . . . What the devil does she say?"

Megaphone in hand, an officer on the crowded bridge of the passing steamer had hailed the cat-boat.

Some of the *England's* hands, standing by the fore-castle rail, waved their caps. Her second mate, in the cat-boat's sternsheets, gave a flourish of his right hand. On the foreigner's national ensign breaking at her main topmast-head he dramatically saluted.

Captain Doddington's good-natured face flushed deep purple.

"None of your monkeying, for'a'd," he thundered, leaning over the rail; "d'ye hear? Aboard this ship there is only one ensign you salute, or I'll teach you something you don't know. D'ye hear? By G—d, Macreay, what do you think of that?" he breathed gustily.

"That's their own business, sir, is it not?" came the pointed reply. "It falls in line with what I've said—there's trouble brewing aboard. . . . Look at the foreigner swanking it down-bay, without her pilot, too. I tell you, sir, this means something for the *England*."

Pursing his slack mouth, the skipper looked resentfully at the excited hands, some of whom were regarding Calhouse with fresh interest as he climbed on board. One of them eagerly grabbed a newspaper which he threw to him as he passed from the waist to the bridge-ladder.

"Is it really mischief that is afoot?" muttered the captain gloomily; "more, perhaps, in Macreay's head than just the maggot of suspicion. Seems to me, I'm growing as prejudiced as he is against t'other side in any form. Lord, Lord, a very wicked business!"

He ran his eye over Calhouse frowningly.

The second officer was spick-and-span and self-important as ever, his close-cut moustache accentuating in its swarthiness his freckled face. A light gleamed in his eye; his step was jaunty. His entire bearing came home to Doddington as that of one who felt he was not in error but had effected something very material.

With his hands thrust into the side-pockets of his white drill coat, and his long legs straddled, the skipper listened to the second mate's explanation. And his tall brows grew wrinkled.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir, all," answered Calhouse, dropping his hard grey eyes to the deck.

"What I have got to say is this," rasped the skipper, "I don't care a d——n if you haven't swapped nationalities; but, no staging for the other side, in this ship! Hear that, my man? . . . You assert you went to Brighton—last train, last night—and missed the connection back to Melbourne this morning. But I've heard that at 12.35 this morning, Mister Calhouse, you were in the company of that foreign steamer's captain and several of his officers, inside a motor-cab making along Collins Street for the water-front. Why the lie?"

The captain, cocking an eye at the pilot coming on board, did not mark the second mate's slight start, nor his face, that went a sickly white, almost instantly to recover its natural hue. Calhouse advanced a step. For the moment it appeared as if he were striking his commanding officer. But Doddington was now immovably regarding him.

"I have a liar before not been called," he pumped out heatedly.

"I myself went Brighton-way—last night, last train!" the captain drily rejoined. "No more of your lying, Mister Calhouse or Kalhausen; and no more of this blustering, or I'll think different of you. What's this?"

He looked at the letter which the second mate had extracted out of his breast-pocket.

"The agent's?"

"Yes. I meet his clerk—the letter had just got to him—as I hurry on the wharf. 'Very important,' he says when I tell him the vessel at Williamstown do catch."

Calhouse's voice was surly, his eyes gleamed insolence.

"You keep your rough edge for your own sort," trounced the captain, "or by G—d I'll rasp you smooth; d'ye hear? A civil air as well as a civil tongue, or I'll plane you down before you're older. What d'ye take yourself for? You keep in mind who I am, mister."

Shoving the letter from the ship's agent into his side pocket, Captain Doddington stepped up the bridge to meet the pilot. The engines opened out their homeward song.

Not till the pilot had been discharged outside the Heads of Port Philip, and the food-carrier's bows pointed the long road to ever-hungry England, did the skipper recollect the letter. Pausing in the doorway of the chart-house, he opened it with some compunctions of conscience.

Surprise gathered on his sunburnt face, ridging the narrow brows.

Carefully he re-perused it, the index finger of his left hand travelling beneath every word as if to bring out its meaning. He slowly turned over the envelope, scrutinised its superscription, then again regarded the contents.

Uneasiness and conjecture superseded surprise. He hailed the first officer who was passing along the bridge-deck.

Just then the outlines of a Commonwealth cruiser rapidly rising away to starboard took his attention. With an exclamation of relief he put up his binoculars, and intently watched her till she passed wide astern. Grunting to himself, he motioned Macreay to step inside the chart-house.

"What d'ye think of this?" he asked, striking the letter with a squab fore-finger. "No shouting, Macreay! Second mate bobbing about the bridge-deck too much to please me."

"Sudden change in the sailing orders, sir!" exclaimed the first officer, reading them over Doddington's shoulder.

'Route *viâ* new naval sub-base, Bass's Straits, cruiser Sydney to pick up eastward bound vessels at 8 p.m. on the 11th.' The Navy Board do think, then, there's foul work to west'ard with these high-speed cruisers of the enemy's coming along. . . . What did I tell you, sir ? "

"Do you say that is really it ? " put Doddington very slowly, his worried eyes engrossing the letter. "Maybe ! maybe ! . . . but . . ."

A babble of excited voices rang out forward. Above them predominated that of the third mate as officer of the watch ; he leaned over the bridge-rail, and stormed at the men. But louder and more incomprehensible waxed the wordy hubbub, for the threatening, remonstrating hands advanced to the bridge-deck steps.

"What the deuce is wrong with the men ? " snorted Doddington, darting to the charthouse doorway, to survey the scene.

"They are at their mischief already, sir ! " cried Macreay.

"Pooh ! Too near the land, and not a man among them game enough for a daylight scrap," returned the skipper. "Someone's been playing on their nerves, I reckon."

"What's all this about, men ? " he asked, looking down at them from the top of the bridge steps. "What d'ye want ? . . . You, there," pointing his fore-finger at a bellowing, thickset seaman of foreign extraction, "shut your mouth ! . . . What is it, lads ? "

His cool voice and unconcerned bearing, the masterfulness, too, shown in the carriage of his long, sparse figure, broke the crowd's clamour, and it became comparatively quiet except for two Dago stokers jabbering and flinging their hands about.

"Well, what d'ye want ? " cried the captain sharply. "Why the devil are ye playing Mumbo-Jumbo ? "

"Dey news ! Do you not know dey news ? By G—t,

ve will not be killed, ve will not be killed," mouthed a filthy trimmer of Continental origin.

"Have you dese not read?" shouted the hand to whom Calhoun had thrown the newspaper, waving it above his head. "Die cruisers kom along west'ard, unt merchant steamers guns do mount. Dey will schweep Englisch scheeps off die zee. Die *England* will be zonk."

"Want me to steer east'ard, eh?"

The men were taken aback by the sudden nexus of idea on Doddington's part, and did not answer, some of them gabbling among themselves.

"You think there is danger to west'ard?" asked the skipper in a curiously small voice, his eye flitting over the throng of excited, dirty faces, to rest for a moment on the second mate, who was watching master and men.

"So, so," bawled some of them, at last recovering from their surprise.

"Die hands at war risks did not sign on," blustered he with *The Melbourne Courant*. "We will not to the death sail. Bei G—t, no! Die——"

"Oh, stow y'r bloomin' gab, Sauer-krauty. You and your mates ain't all the 'ands! Wot yer frit abaht? 'E thinks 'e'll ketch it 'ot as a deserter from his bloomin' Nahvy," broke from a Cockney in one of the small group of Britishers. "'Oo's frit—that's wot I wants to know?"

"We're all right, Cap'n," called the snow-boy of the refrigerators, who had worked his way to^h beside the Cockney. "'Tain't us that's scar't. It's all 'em fat-earted furriners!"

"Just so," volleyed the skipper, coming down the steps. "Lay for'a'd there, and carry on. D'ye hear? No more of this fooling. Who's master here, eh? I'll soon let you know, if it comes to that. You'll have a purchase clapped on your ugly mugs. Move sprightly, d'ye hear!"

Spluttered 'Sauer-krauty': "It is not west'ard die *England* will——"

But one of his compatriots thrusting a hand on his mouth, the skipper heard no more. Breathing out exasperation and wrath, he stalked down on them, his clenched hands still in his side pockets, and the crowd scattered forward.

"Hear that Bremen hand, sir?" growled Macreay. "Something aback of his last words."

"There is," affirmed Doddington laconically, as he came up the steps, a grim, hard look lining his face.

Doddington watched the second mate go slowly along to his cabin, looking intently to port; then motioned Macreay into the charthouse. He pulled out the agent's letter again, and pointed to the note heading and then to the type-script.

"What do you think of that?"

Minutely the first officer examined the sheet of paper. Of a sudden he paused, and looked at the skipper.

"Never seen a letter of his signed this way, sir," said he slowly. "It's all pen-and-ink in his office—no rubber stamp and initialling."

"Pen-and-ink in his office. D'ye mark the envelope, too, is typed—I've never seen that before in any of his. That letter, Macreay, has been run out not through his Blick—and he has only the one machine—but a riband-inking typewriter, as the letters show."

"Paper been nicked!"

"The paper, as you say, has been lifted out of his office, and the letter typed somewhere."

"But the orders, sir?"

Captain Doddington took a deep breath.

"That's where Calhouse and they have stumbled—didn't know that in event of the convoy base being changed from Albany to Bass's Straits I was to be informed either at the Heads or by the east'ard bound cruiser. You saw her pass!"

"It's the antimony, sir!"

"£28,000 worth of bullion is not to be shipped without some news leaking out. They intended to snap up the *England* down east'ard; handier for their base, Simpson-hafen, and neutral ports."

The mate stifled an oath, and pointed out the foreign steamer rising into sight away to port.

Macreay looked at the captain. The captain looked at Macreay.

"We can now guess what they're busy on inside those two canvas contraptions of hers," remarked the skipper savagely. "We'll keep the course, Macreay, keep the course. . . . The second mate and his countrymen? A question whether or not I'll put them into irons early to-morrow morning. . . . Mustn't chance anything. No! Mustn't chance anything, Macreay."

"This letter is the second mate's work, sir—must have pinched the notepaper."

The skipper nodded. Looking at the *Continental*, he drew a finger significantly across his throat. The first officer, cursing softly under his breath, noted she was now dropping astern.

East and West the shipping of the nations concerned had already become disorganised. Liners at port of call as well as of destination being requisitioned for service, the mails and urgent shipments were being sent by the first outgoing vessels available. Thus had come about the shipment of bullion in the *England*, the total amount of which was being distributed between various steamers, fears being entertained for the safety of the trade routes against the depredations of the enemy's cruisers and privateers.

When, at midnight, eight bells of the first watch went, and the second mate came on duty with the middle watch, Captain Doddington regarded him with suspicious inquisitiveness.

To his antagonistic eye, Kalhausen showed threads of suspense and anxiety overlying his usual cast of stolidity.

His glass he kept fixed on the lights of a steamer that, coming up off the food-carrier's port quarter, was evidently steering for Portland Bay on a course taking her across the *England's* bows.

"Why the deuce doesn't she cross astern!" exclaimed the skipper. "Stand by the hooter, Mister. . . . Fo'c'sle still restless!" as an altercation, carried on in half a dozen divers tongues, echoed bridgeward through the windless night.

"Is it not to be expected, sir?" returned the second mate defiantly, moving to the syren lanyard.

Doddington ignored his reply, and again scrutinised the nearing steamer.

"A full-powered boat," grunted the skipper, taking the binoculars from his eyes, "and travelling smartly. A lubberly way of handling her—crossing our bows. Keep your eye on her, Mister Calhouse. . . . I'll be up again in a minute or less."

His low, cautious voice reached the first officer awaiting him at the foot of the bridge-ladder.

"The deck and stokehold foreigners are together in this, sir. 'Chips' says he saw the second mate coming out of the firemen's fo'c'sle just on four bells. He seems to have been meeting them ashore, too. It's the bullion that is fetching all the aliens."

Captain Doddington made a menacing motion of his right hand.

"Rouse out the engineers and the bo's'un. 'Chips' to bring along the irons. All this watch foreigners, but we can depend on our own men to bear a hand in tying them up after this fool craft is passed. Fourteen of us against thirty-seven. . . . D—n them, I'll choke them all."

As the master was regaining the bridge a gun broke out on board the approaching steamer, and the second mate, answering on the hooter, slowed down the *England's* engines.

Doddington leaped to the telegraph, and tore him away. Kalhausen grappled with him.

“ You are my prisoner, capitan ! ”

The skipper freed himself and struck out. But the wheel, flinging himself forward, pinned him round the elbows with his circling arms and clasped hands.

As they three struggled madly, some of the watch scrambled on the bridge and secured Doddington. Yells, huzzas, hoarse cries of encouragement, hatred, rage, rang out amidships and forward as the few Britishers closed with the enemy and their allies.

“ You hear, capitan . . . it is war. . . . All over. . . . It is this.”

Kalhausen gave a wave of his arm, including the armed merchant steamer and the struggles on the forecastle and foredeck. But he spoke thickly, hesitatingly—not as an exulting victor.

“ It is treachery. . . . You hound . . . ! ”

Captain Doddington’s voice broke short. He had ceased to resist, and was standing in a passive attitude, his brain engaged in a last desperate effort for England.

Again his raging eyes swerved across the narrowing reach; and sullen dismay took him on marking the enemy had also slowed. Her side electrics switched on to starboard, she was busily getting away boats.

“ It is our order,” replied Kalhausen deprecatingly. “ Our steamers under your very eyes their guns are mounting. . . . Your scheeps, your food scheeps, and all to be destroyed. It is the order—‘ England to starve.’ ”

The next moment the Lieutenant zur Seewehr had sprung to the rail, bellowing orders.

For out of the alley-ways swept the food-carrier’s infuriated afterguard and engineers, armed with hammers, spanners, fire-bars, belaying pins—formidable weapons clubbing through bone and brain. Squeals of agony ripped through the night air—guttural yells and oaths—all the hoarse convulsive cries of a fierce mêlée.

Macreay gained the top of the bridge-ladder, and with a deep roar hurled himself on those in possession—others at his heels. Doddington, with a jerk, wrenched himself out of the grasp of his guards as they dodged the blows, and threw himself on the wheel, jamming it hard over.

The *England* came veering athwart the enemy, and thumped into her quarter. But too sluggish was either, for him to achieve destruction.

Just then out of the near dark flashed a searchlight's relentless glare, to fall on the two entangled vessels. It was reinforced by the thud and boom of a great gun.

The Commonwealth cruiser *Victoria*, having been in communication with the Heads, was returning westward to Albany.

CALL OF THE BREED

CAPTAIN KENNEY, staff-officer of the Commonwealth Naval Forces, did not seem perturbed.

Chuckling to himself, he straightened his thin figure from bending over the scout's fore bridge-rail in his anxiousness to see ahead. Very intently he looked at her commanding officer.

A quizzical expression flitted over his hard, keen features.

Again he chuckled.

"Report me, Torrington, report me, if that'll salve your conscience. . . . Closed my left eye to the rest of that wireless message, and couldn't read it. You remember Some One once put the glass to his blind eye, and also couldn't read his orders?"

Commander Torrington shrugged his shoulders. Irritation still simmering lent pique to his mellow voice.

"Nelson is Nelson, sir! You have no hand in this trip. The Admiralty's instruction was to tranship you."

"There is no likelihood of the enemy doing much in the Pacific, Torrington! You wouldn't have me lose the chance of a lifetime?"

The commander gave a saturnine laugh. He wiped the blobs of fog-dew off his binoculars, and gazed down the short bridge.

"We all know Simpsonhafen force'll keep you Australians busy. You ought not to be on board this vessel now, sir," said he bluntly. "You'll be killed, too; that is a certainty! You know what this cruiser is running up against. . . . Your post, sir, is at the other side of the Pacific!"

Kenney stepped impulsively to the commander, who was standing a few feet to starboard, his first lieutenant and the navigator beside him.

"Torrington," said he slowly, "if you were in my place—what would you have done? And, after all we've been hearing about the enemy's smartness and so on! What would you have done?"

Torrington glanced covertly at his officers, on whose faces was a suspicion of a grin.

"The same, just the same!" he snapped, raising his voice against the wind. "Yet I ought to have transhipped you as instructed to the first vessel of ours bound in; even if you had had to be manhandled. I tell you plainly, sir, it involves more than your ignoring instructions."

Wherein Commander D. S. Torrington, M.V.O., was right to an extent he could not even have imagined. For the whirligig of circumstance at times inclines strangely.

Already on that epoch-making evening the British squadrons were moving, in the endeavour to seal up the Imperial High Seas Fleet within the confines of the North Sea, thus stopping its egress to the Atlantic. So unexpectedly had come the hostilities that the cruiser, now most easterly of far-flung scouts, had been diverted off Spurn Head in her passage from the north of Scotland to her base.

To investigate the Ems Roadstead where the 3rd and 4th Divisions of the High Seas Fleet had been reported to be shipping supplementary ratings—and to transship her passenger at the earliest opportunity—these had been the principal instructions wirelessly from Whitehall.

"Not getting in but getting out of the Roadstead, that is what'll tax even us," growled Commander Torrington. "No good minimizing the dangers, gentlemen, of getting away with our intelligence. You know

the 'gats,' as they call them, of the West Ems are constantly shifting; and our charts—well!—we likewise know what our Admiralty charts are, of the Friesland waters—d——d well worthless!"

"It's a death-trap in this weather," remarked Kenney cheerfully. "They'll have removed the whistle and bell buoys."

"You know the Roadstead?" Torrington shot out the question in surprise.

"I do," came the grave reply. "I've had some wild-fowl shooting on the Ems flats more than once, with my London cousin's husband, van Hutten, whose people live in West Friesland. . . . But we'll get out."

"'Get out'!—get anywhere—us! Don't you let your ardour, sir, run away with you, when we're under fire. You look on. You've made me responsible for you, and, by G——d, I'll look after you. Your work lies in Australia . . . insufficiently staffed there, as it is."

The Commonwealth officer uttered vehement protestation. But Torrington stepped away towards the little group of officers past the wheel, to port, and an eddy of wind together with the roar of the stokehold ventilating fan just abaft the narrow bridge overpowered the Commonwealth's officer's voice.

The warship drove her bows through a thickening summit of the swell—squashed her headlong way inexorably—and spray gushed far up her shoulder to fall back into the ridges of boiling wash trailing alongside. Kenney brushed a far-rending tip of brine out of his eyes, and looked around in high feather.

Satisfaction, and a strange savage exultation, arose within him.

Yes! He was going into action for the first time, and now would see if the Old Stock was still sound in the shock of hostilities. But his was to be the part of a spectator, gathering intelligence and experience to be

embodied in a private report to the Commonwealth Naval Board.

The staff-officer's eye roved along the decks, glancing with approval at the details now but dimly visible.

In shelter amidships and by the break of the fore-castle stood reliefs to gun-crews, standing by, watch and watch. Just under the poop, the gunnery lieutenant was to be faintly made out, examining the breech-block of the starboard quickfirer there, and to many forcible gestures talking to Number One in the rear of his gun. With lookouts straining their eyeballs, the scout sped onwards into deepening night.

Beyond the outflung white water at her stem hung the haze, ever thickening in streaks and folds. From under its curtain rolled dim, sullen seas, that crested and crumbled under the push of the swell and the counter-thrust of the eastward current.

It came to Captain Kenney that not seamanship—not vigilance and caution, quick, determinative—but only the instincts of born seamen could carry the scout through successfully.

"Inside their westerly lines?" he jerked out, as the cruiser's commanding officer came astand near the wheel and again turned his binoculars ahead.

"Inside their lines. Borkum off starboard bow. Patrols ought to be moving around. Oh, d——n all this muck coming down! It'll blind the *Aboukir* and the hydroplanes that're pushing eastward to strengthen us."

Torrington snapped out an order, monosyllabic, curt, and gun crews sprang to attention; officers, quick and alert at their posts. Aching eyes in the sighting-top grew strained and tense.

The scout was on the very edge of the Real Thing.

Excitement swept through the Australian, aggravating his feeling of restlessness.

A sharp-eyed lookout hailed the bridge peremptorily.

The officers switched their eyes on the trailing fog off the port bow.

Out of a deepening bastion there slipped a dark wedge-shaped snout; the hull of a long, low, three-funnelled torpedo-boat succeeding with confusing rapidity.

Torrington acted with swift, merciless judgment.

The cruiser swerved a little to port. There came a dull crunch of rending steel, and a momentary hubbub of startled and enraged voices.

The Australian looked back as the scout, veering to her course, drove pitilessly onwards.

The torpedo craft had been halved abaft her after funnel, and only the forward part was afloat. The tip of her bows was visible, dark, and protruding from the grey pall of vapour rising from her. Even as the thickness closed down, her boilers burst with a dull roar.

"Lucky, if that hasn't given the alarm!" grunted Commander Torrington.

Brows knit and eyes gleaming, he was throwing quick hawk-like glances over the quarter. His under lip thrust out repulsively, the clenched teeth showing, his attitude suggested to Kenney that of the huntsman getting scent of his quarry. It had no traces of the suspense and the deliberation which aged the face of the youthful navigating lieutenant.

Behind the fog, that was growing more luminous as they neared the land, lay the island of Borkum between the west and east mouths of the Ems. Its batteries, gunpits, and patrols protect the seaward approach and up-river channels to the Ems Roadstead and the westerly naval base of Emden. Yet shoals and shifting sands and tidal 'watersheds' form a more impenetrable defence.

The Germanic Empire, behind her dangerous North Sea Littoral with its baffling outposts of island and shoaling lagoon reinforced by her numerous torpedo-boats and submarines, had once thought to stand

exultingly at ease on land, while her fleet ranged toward the wide Atlantic ; while her Ally's naval forces swooped into the Mediterranean, essaying Austrian ardour for the sea ; while cruisers and commerce destroyers were ravaging the British Empire's merchantmen on the seas of both hemispheres. While, too, her second naval line, that fleet in being,' was to compel England to concentrate her naval reserves, thus depriving her commerce of protection.

In the easing of the cruiser's engines, as she came abreast of the east end of Borkum, Britain's own imminent straits stood on the brink of disclosure.

"Forepeak picking up the belling of Borkum underwater signals to their patrols," said Torrington to the Australian staff-officer, as he whisked the drops of brine off his eyebrows with his fore-finger, "that'll bear me out as to my position for the East Ems here. We'll round the sands, back of Borkum, see what's what in the roadstead there, then picking up the channel into Huibert Gat work out to seaward by the West Ems. Thank God for this fog ! Isn't it good ? "

"Good !" ejaculated the Australian in admiration, and scepticism, too. "Call it 'Good' d'ye ? She'll break up on the Ranzel shoal, lying aground under gunfire. Borkum covers up-river also. It's hell-gate, she's going into ! You'll never get your intelligence away. You'll——"

"Can do ! " interjected Torrington curtly, pursing his lips." This Navy of ours has been through many hell-gates. About West Ems, d'ye know if——"

Suddenly his mouth stiffened, and his hand shot up, silencing the midshipman at the forepeak bridge-telephone. Kenney gripped the rail convulsively, as if it could sustain him against unexpected death.

Stillness had dropped mysteriously upon the scout.

Ahead a huge mass, but very little darker than the fog, was standing across the cruiser's course. The great war-

ship loomed as she swayed onwards to the deep. In the silence along the decks of the softly stepping scout resounded the slither and splash of the waters curling from the distant ram-bows.

On board the enemy a bugle-call rang out.

Torrington's lips parted, but still no order came. In the stress of his mental workings, the muscles of his face stood out like cords.

The next moment the battleship was swallowed up in the folds of night and the fog.

"Close shave, eh," quoth the commander laconically. "All up with this craft if the lot of them are slipping downstream. Just on high-water—that'll take us neatly over the inner bar, abreast of where O 4 and O 5 buoys should be. . . . You know it, eh, Captain Kenney. . . . What! . . . Forepeak picking up two bellings, port and starboard, apparently. Damnation! What do they mean? Looking for a needle in a haystack!—hitting the channel up-river with this dirt in the air."

"Starboard bellings is the Memmert underwater-signal station," observed Captain Kenney in a quiet voice, "I have reason to know. They had just put it into use when van Hutten and I were last around shooting. Let Memmert bellings fall abeam to port before you head on the bar. That's what we always did."

So into the East Ems in full flood, past Nordland Flat and Koper Sand, slipped the British cruiser, lookouts doubled, leadsmen in the bows and on the bridge sounding-ledges—and gun-crews expectant. From Friesland, with her miles of marshes and sodden heath, fog billowed deeper through the darkness, diffusing a ghostly sub-light.

Like a thing endued with instinct the British scout surged up mid-channel.

It was just what H.M.S. *Cornwall* accomplished one thick, dirty night in August 1909; when, without a pilot on board, she navigated the intricate passage up

Kiel Fiord, and silently and unseen picked up her moorings in the anchorage, to amaze and perplex the great naval base next morning.

As the Australian officer leaned out over the fore bridge-rail, and peered upstream, he was aware of his thumping heart.

When to port a shadow flitted past—some small craft dropping seaward—he held in his breath for the crash of guns. None came, and in a gust of self-disparagement he told himself that his was but a tinsel courage.

One dim outline, low, sinister, loomed to starboard. It was succeeded by others moored at two cables' interval.

Commander Torrington craned himself in gaze.

A voice gave the alarm as the scout drew abreast of the third craft, and British guns opened into thunder. The navigator—his mental faculties, needle-points in precision and sharpness—thrusting her between the fifth and fourth of the hostile line, headed for the channel round the up-river end of the Ranzel Sand. Her guns broke up the adjacent small craft, and sent them piecemeal to the bottom sooner than they could release their tubes.

The infernal hubbub ran along the enemy lines. Almost instantly the deep mouthing of Borkum's guns deafened the ear.

Captain Kenney held his body braced, rigid, as against some preternatural shock. His face was distorted like that of a choking man.

The thundering of the great guns, the earsplitting whistle and roar of projectiles around and overhead, the crash and shrill of exploding shell, the incessant gushes of pink and crimson fire irradiating the haze, created someone who was not him.

One who had no past—and would have no future. One whose being moved only in the present flying past, bloody-fanged and terrible.

The cruiser reeled—she quivered and lurched on missiles striking her. A heavy projectile crashed against the coaming of the forecastle hatchway, and a chasm opened up there, the deck around it jagged and twisted.

But the Australian officer was unconscious of the slivers screeching past.

A fierce and frantic emotion thrilled him. Fire ran in his veins, and mounted to his head. From him all thoughts whirled afar. Save one! It was of duty to perform.

From Borkum's batteries, shrapnel and shell swept across the scout, and bodies of dead and wounded gun-numbers cluttered her torn deck. Some of them slid through its fissures to fall on the deck beneath, or, caught by the splintered plating, suffer excruciating tortures.

As Kenney flung himself face-down to escape a shell bursting low, he saw Commander Torrington drop as if his knees had been knocked from under him, and fall across the dying navigator.

With a guttural cry the Australian sprang to his feet and reached him. As he flung himself on his knees beside him, the quartermaster who had taken the wheel fell over; his chest and left shoulder shot away.

Uncertainly the scout's bows swung away; but the next instant Captain Kenney was steadying her. In an agony of mind he felt about mentally for her position.

It was in vain.

"... Hard aport ... hard aport ... Huibert Flat ..." moaned the dying commander, trying to drag himself on his elbows to the wheel. "... Lauwers ground. ... Oh, God ..."

Kenney thrust the wheel hard over.

Clear, minute, there stood in his memory's eye, van Hutten's section chart of the West Ems. Staff-Captain

A. J. Kenney became a calculating machine. Unwittingly he reached away with his right hand as if to guide the cruiser.

With the flames from her riven funnels trailing broad and low upon her crumpled deck and upperworks, she was fleeing for the open. Already units of the enemy's lines farther upstream were slipping their moorings, and seaward, Borkum was playing her array of search-lights, but with no result.

To the Commonwealth officer, seconds, minutes, might have elapsed into hours, for all he was aware of the passage of time. Of a sudden, a terrible numbness paralysed his side. Darkness came sweeping upon his senses. He tried to keep his footing. His voice rang out desperately to the deck.

Staff-Captain Kenney was relinquishing command.

When he came back to consciousness it was to him that threads of fire ran up his side. It felt like one vast wound, swelling, swelling with innumerable small wounds. He seemed to float on waves of pain alternating with gnawing, shooting agonies.

He recovered his senses to find himself bandaged, and still lying on the bridge. Overhead arc-electrics swung out from the looming *Aboukir* illumed the stricken cruiser.

"Their 3rd and 4th divisions have certainly slipped out. It must have been a delayed unit, we saw," some one was saying, a few feet behind his head; and with difficulty he recognized the husky voice as that of the scout's third lieutenant. "Destroyers were lying where the Intelligence placed the battleships, and there are no other deep soundings in the Roadstead. . . . But for Captain Kenney, we'd have been aground, and broken up by Borkum guns. He took us clear."

"He did, did he!" exclaimed the *Aboukir's* officer. "Lucky we picked you up; this old hooker is going down by the stern. We'll get away on their heels 'stead of

fooling round the Ems to their destroyers' delectation, etc. . . . As well for all of us, Captain Kenney did disregard instructions. But there'll be a row about it. . . . Eh ? ”

It was thus the Call of the Breed came to Captain A. J. Kenney.

THE NIGHT OF IMRIE'S VENGEANCE

It is as unnecessary as it would be unwise to inquire into the career of Aylmer Imrie, sometime officer R.N.R., after he resigned his commission at the abrupt request of 'My Lords' at Whitehall. But that he had now been too long, altogether too long, in the West Indies, for good to himself and fortunes, was the opinion of his first mate as on a certain night very early in the Great War he watched the master of the ss. *Caribbee* approach down the landing-stage, Fourrier Bay, north-west Dominica.

"Any fresh news, Gribbertson? Hello, our contraband not yet here."

"No, not 'ere, sir," replied the mate in an aggrieved voice; "but I've just 'eard another d—d cruiser 'as joined the Germans standin' off and on Portsmouth, round the cove, and not a glimpse to our sore eyes o' the White Ensign yet. The enemy are looking out for somebody or something, sir, in Dominica 'ere."

Captain Imrie took the cigar out of his mouth and stared in silence at its glowing tip.

The mate comprehended something unwelcome was weighing on his mind.

"The enemy are watching to kill the trade," remarked Captain Imrie at last drily. "That is why up at Plantation House Mr. Lascelles has turned me down—refused to ship any cargo just now for up the Islands. And now, I'll tell you what is hitting me. These Germans, mark you, Gribbertson, are sinking no vessels with empty holds. D'ye understand? Not one!" he exclaimed, his voice quivering with exasperation.

"Then you throwed away that money to the under-

writers, sir," replied the first man with the bluntness of a familiar shipmate. "It come to me at the time when you took up that 'ere line of theirs on the old 'ooker at war risks."

Imrie frowned at his subordinate. But in the dusky gloom the mate failed also to see the amusement and derision wrinkling his pouchy mouth and clean-shaven chin.

"Umph!" he grunted. "Don't you, Gribbertson, let that notion simmer in your head—*Caribbee's* empty holds or none! You have sailed long enough with me to know that, though I'm now fond enough of the grog to let it keep me under-dog, I'll not suffer any measly *Deutschers* to ditch my nest-egg. No, sir!" he emphasised with heat in his deep tones. "You remember the saying in the old days when you and I belonged to 'Andrew Millar'—'Can do'—eh? Well, it is 'Can do' . . . yet, my lad . . . That's from me, and I'm no fool!"

In irritation he puffed at his cigar, then after a pause took out his watch and peered into its dial.

"I make it close on eleven-thirty, mate. That gentleman is very late!"

"Ain't 'e, sir, the President of the Board of Commerce at 'ome? Wot a bit o' luck for bygones that 'ud be!"

"I don't know if it is Mr. Marlborough, but this sudden war has ended his tour that was to benefit everybody so very much; and Gribbertson, has he the pluck to run the gauntlet of the enemy's cruisers? I don't give that for the staying powers of his pluck!"—and Imrie snapped his fingers—"he is Mr. Changeabout! . . . Whoever the passenger is, I don't object to his £100 for slipping him across to catch the Guadeloupe mail-boat for Bordeaux. . . . But, Mr. Marlborough aboard us. . . . Ah! . . ."

Imrie, chuckling softly to himself, leaned over the rail; he pulled in satisfaction at his cigar, and with the tip of his little finger flicked the ash into the softly gurgling water of the cove. Pursuing his train of thought he

squinted at the vague outline of the coaster anchored in outer soundings, then at some of his hands.

They had scrambled out of the boat lying at the foot of the wooden stairs near by, and were vociferously talking among themselves in the dim light of the oil-lantern nailed to one of the piles supporting the stage.

"Will the lot of these lubbers have the nerve, will they have the nerve? By the Lord!—for ten good men out of 'Andrew,' " he muttered, as if misdoubting his crew's steadiness under some acute stress.

His cogitation was interrupted by the rattle of loose spokes and rapid trotting of horses as a chaise swung through the sleeping, half-deserted native village, and then drew up under the groo-groo palms facing the landing-stage.

"Here comes our passenger, mate. Send a hand up for his traps, and all stand by to cast off. I'm in a hurry—with this piece of 'contraband.' "

A fever of suspense took Imrie as he advanced up the stage, and he strained ears and eyes to their utmost. It had occurred to him he might have been mistaken.

Grim intention puckered Imrie's short thick brows. In his deep-set eyes gleamed sudden fire. And it was to remain smouldering till the end.

"Captain Imrie?"

"Yes . . . right . . .," he replied, throwing his cigar away on recognizing the voice. . . . "Mr. Fitch of Portsmouth and Roseau! . . . I was beginning to think, sir, your friend had taken fright at the enemy crowding around for something."

Vainly he peered at the two obscure figures, who were pausing as he came up to them.

"Taken fright? Not he," was the answer. "Don't you know him?"

Imrie made a snatch at the fireflies, dancing in the stream of the land breeze, and stepping closer thrust the elators before his passenger's face. The living sparks of

fire glowing with green phosphorescent light illumed the features of him in a ghastly manner.

Narrowly the skipper looked at him.

In the second or two of silence, the croak of the tree-toad in the little mangrove swamp at hand rang with strange distinctness through the stir of night life.

That full face with its strong rounded jaws and well-developed brows, the heavily lidded eyes, the truculently twisted lips, and upturned nasal organ had been riveted on Imrie's memory heretofore.

"No," said he stolidly, controlling his mad elation, "no, I have not the honour. . . . Your word in the business, Mr. Fitch, is enough for me to go upon."

"Let it remain at that then, Captain Imrie," responded the Dominican legislator in a grave voice. "It is better. . . . You will put him on board the *Campagnie Générale's* liner safe and sound?"

"Safe and sound on board the Frenchman, sir, as is possible."

These words were uttered with an emphasis, which caused his passenger to stare at him as he shook the proffered hand.

Not another word spoke the skipper till he had climbed the unlit *Caribbee's* accommodation ladder and gained the deck in the rear of the Unknown.

"Damn your eyes!" he exploded, turning on the mate, "damn your eyes, Gribbertson!—where're your sailing lights?"

The bronzed face of the mate in the radiance of the seaman's lantern illuming the gangway expressed intense surprise—perplexity. His eye flitted seaward. It fell back to the passenger beside them.

"Doused them, sir, as ordered with the enemy around."

"Doused them . . . Pshaw! What to be scared of with empty holds. Smartly as ye like, or she'll be steaming against the east'ard stream; the flow's on

the turn. . . . A quick run she needs to catch the Basse-Terre mail-boat. . . . Steward! Take this gentleman aft."

With eyes slewed seaward Imrie mounted his bridge, and for a little he stood by the top of the ladder trying to pierce the darkness in the offing.

"Haze and a gout of rain when the *terral* fails. . . . These pickets of the Germans off Portsmouth'll surely pick me up, and a stern chase gives me the chance," he muttered thoughtfully. "A big slice of excitement—and a bigger cheque at the end of it all, next month!"

Aware he was being followed, he wheeled with the precise movement of a determined will.

"What is it you want, sir?"

"Is it not hazardous—I may remind you—excessively hazardous—in such a time as this—to show sailing lights?"

The Unknown mouthed his words with sententious vehemence as one in high standing and of authority. There was an undertone of sharp concern—discomfort of mind—in his peculiar lisping voice that brought to Imrie an access of savage joy.

"Yes," he replied with instant acerbity, and casting a keen and sly look at the anxious face as the masthead lantern swung past up to the truck, "that is a very material point. But neither you nor I, sir, want this vessel to be run down by a cruiser or flyaway liner also steaming without lights; and, too, the report is that the enemy sink nothing with empty holds. The more crews get home, the more mouths to feed there, and it is starving out old England the enemy aim at. I have more at stake than you, sir," he ran on with curtly.

". . . Of paramount importance I reach London as soon as possible—not . . . myself . . . others at home! . . . This insane and fatuous conflict!"

The troubled voice came irregularly on the skipper's

ear as he moved away, tongue in cheek and bull-dog under-jaw thrust out. Forward the clackety steam capstan had stopped, voices rang out on the forecastle head, then a hail reached the bridge.

"He'll get all I can send his way, he will! Here goes," the officer growled between clinched teeth, as he fisted the engine-room telegraph and rang up below.

With quickening engines the West Indian trader opened out the land to the southward, where Prince Rupert Bluff, soon looming out, hid the peeps of starlight beyond and enshrouded within its sea-girt gloom any indications of the enemy watching Portsmouth. Northward she swung for the Tricolore, fifteen miles away.

Her first and second mates received certain orders, and descended amazedly to the deck. Their voices rumbled and raged amongst the blacks and 'dirty whites' forming the crew.

Soon along the deck both of her derricks were shipped and slewed as if ready to break cargo, their winches spluttering and spirting forth steam from leaking joint and union. The mate then busied himself in the holds. This done, he repaired to the captain's cabin in the deck-house, just abaft and adjoining the chart-room at the foot of the short bridge-ladder, slipped the brace of Colts out of their locked drawer into his breast-pocket, and regained the bridge.

Imrie, who was standing down to port intently searching the night astern, grunted acknowledgment when he felt Gribbertson slide one of the weapons into his right-hand side-pocket.

Again his gaze engrossed the dark wastes.

After a little it occurred to him, he had reckoned over-much on the Germans' vaunted vigilance and superior steaming powers. And disquiet and chagrin fell upon him.

"By thunders, suppose the cruisers have gone south again to Roseau," he mumbled to himself in disgust. "A scurvy trick of fortune's to leave me alone!"

He glanced along the bridge to starboard at his passenger who was leaning against the rail, with eye gloomily bent on the dim ribands of foam and trails of phosphorescence flickering alongside to burst into brilliant streamers and tangles of fire when the groundswell heaved sluggishly past. Satisfaction, anxiety, suspense, swept over the skipper in successive high-tides.

In seeking his 'nest-egg' was he not of necessity incurring misadventure, mayhap death?

He shrugged his shoulders.

Would that not be but tardy retribution?

"The 'ands'll sartinly make trouble, sir, at the first touch," remarked the first mate, in a low voice, as both officers leaned far over the bridge-rail, with eager eyes and ears. "That scum shipped at Curaçoa are mouthing the risks. They——"

"It'll all be short and sharp, one way or t'other. Neither of us are scared of the odds, eh," the skipper broke in with; "and I can trust Yankee Sam in the engine-room to keep her going. What do you say, Gribbertson, 'about the passenger'? Safe and sound on board the Frenchman—as is possible. That's what I gave my hand to. . . . But it is a hundred times his hundred pounds the enemy must make this trip bring in."

Suddenly the blood surged through Imrie's veins, and he sprang back. The first mate disappeared in three steps from the bridge, and joined the second officer amidships. Forward, a gabble of uneasy voices spread loud on the sultry air, but was lost in the winches' sudden clatter and grinding.

The skipper fingered the Colt in his side-pocket.

Again the shaft of dazzling white light shot out in the south-west, and wheeled across the stretch of sea to port. It cleaved the night like lightning, and resting this time on the coaster flooded her from stem to stern in inexorable scrutiny.

The thud of a quick-firing gun rolled quick and ominous on the ear. A projectile screeching over the *Caribbee* burst in a small geyser of snowy spray some yards off her starboard bow.

As Captain Imrie, muttering conjectures as to his fortunes, rang off the engines, a rocket went up in a thread of pink fire high into the darkness off his starboard quarter. An exclamation of gladness and relief escaped his lips, and he switched his night binoculars hitherward.

The passenger touched him on the right elbow.

"Your engines are slowing, Captain Imrie."

The words rang sharp and imperative. In the harsh voice were undernotes of warning and censure. Flurry and despair stood plain in the lines of the Unknown's constrained figure.

Indeed his whole demeanour was that of a man at bay.

"What would you, sir?" asked the master, handing him the glasses. "Sou'-west there is a lump of a cruiser that has brought us up short, and a small craft of theirs is coming up on the starboard quarter. . . . The Germans are not sinking empty bottoms; this'll be merely a matter of search. . . . All hands are safe enough. A belch of wind and rain is breaking over us, sir, you had better get down to the chartroom till it clears."

The pause of a few seconds ensued. Both eyed each other.

"I am Mr. Marlborough."

This statement, simple but portentous—attaching to itself a characteristic amount of self-assertiveness and self-conscious worth—was accompanied by a gesture so pregnant with explanation as to make Imrie's heart pulse with malevolence.

"What. . . . Mr. Marlborough!" he rasped in well-simulated surprise, "you are Mr. Marlborough! It is you then, they are after."

The Minister assented with an inclination of his head.

His wet face, just within the shadowy limits of the binnacle light, showed cool but pallid. He wore the aspect of a doomed man—one aware of his stubborn enemy's purpose.

"Yes . . . after me . . ." he ejaculated in a thin, high voice.

But the skipper's eyes had fled into the rain-shot gloom forward. His winches had suddenly ceased their wheezing as if the weight of wet in the flurry of wind choked them.

"Ship ahoy. What ship is that?" a megaphone belched in good English through the dirty blackness to starboard.

"*Caribbee*, West Indian coaster. . . . Dominica to Guadeloupe. . . . Light," shouted the master through hollowed hands.

"Am boarding you. Stand by for a line."

As the small craft steamed round into the British vessel's lee the rain greatened with tropical violence, and laid the wind. Her decks thrummed like a big drum. From the upperworks the water gouted in sheets, and flooded the scuppers in the waist. Falling vertically, with a loud hiss the cloudburst smote the surface of the near sea into foam, and blurred the searchlight's beam to a vague grey luminosity.

"Just what I looked for! We may escape," roared Imrie to the Minister; and blinking hard, for the rain stung like lead-drops, the skipper again gripped the engine-room telegraph. "On deck there, stand by for their line. . . . Stand by, Mr. Gribbertson."

The German boat surged alongside. A harsh voice rang out peremptorily. Her engine-room gong clashed, and a rope came hurtling up the coaster's rusty side.

While some of her hands bent down to grab it, her derricks with dull clamber of pinion wheel swayed simultaneously outwards. Imrie's voice snapped from the bridge like the twang of a steel bow. To thuds of

the mate's and boatswain's hammers five tons of pig-iron ballast, at the end of the topping lifts thirty feet overhead, plumped with a rending crash through the small craft's bows and fore deck.

Some one parted her rope. The *Caribbee* jumped forward to "Full steam ahead."

Yells of surprise and dumbfounded rage clamoured out—and of death agonies, too. A head of steam spouted voluminous and mist-like through the rain; the German's hooter sent forth a series of shrieks. And forthwith a gun boomed in succour from her cruiser.

"My God!" Mr. Marlborough burst out with, leaping to Captain Imrie, "this is awful! It is a most barbarous atrocity."

"Nothing to what is coming," the skipper warned in a cool voice, looking astern where the night and the rain were already obscuring all; "nothing at all! You call it a most barbarous atrocity, and I call it war; but maybe that's a 'terminological inexactitude'? Anyhow, you've won clear by it."

"Unnecessary. . . . The cruiser'll overhaul us."

"She'll do more than that," came the grim retort, "or I for one will be most mightily disappointed. And don't you forget, sir, war at sea is not the kid-glove sort we had in South Africa. . . . Gribbertson, douse your light. . . . I'm casting an eye at the chart. The *Saintes* bearing ahead, I'll hold up the *Bordeaux* liner there—if all goes well."

The Minister's sight clung to Imrie's stalwart figure as he dropped down the ladder to gain the chartroom. His carriage still kept a hint of naval service. Then shaking his dripping self, Mr. Marlborough wiped the rain off his face and stared astern.

The downfall and haze were passing away into the southwest, smudging the distance there into deeper darkness, and still dissipating the searchlights. But to windward the atmosphere was now clear, the stars again blazed like

diamonds in the indigo night, and the breeze blowing soft brought the smell of the land and its spicery from the near islands of Marie-Galante and Grande-Terre.

The headlong pace of the coaster made hull and deck quiver as if the rivets were sheering one by one under the incessant pounding of her compound engines. Steam came roaring louder from the escapes. Now and again a ruddy glow curled along the underside of the black smoke vomited from her funnel, that was rapidly growing red by the fiddley.

Of a sudden Mr. Marlborough touched the mate, then pointed astern.

Vengeful and terrible the eye of the cruiser, that had shot ahead of the deluge, was again wheeling and leaping athwart the waters, flooding them with dazzling whiteness. Almost instantaneously the beam settled on the fugitive, and remained steadfast.

"I cannot escape. . . . Impossible."

The cry was wrung from the Minister—agonizedly—like a dying man's.

Yet it was not for himself.

"They'll 'ave lowered a boat to pick up their small craft. By thunders, don't they come along," cried Gribbertson, stepping back from hailing the chartroom. "But if an old Navy officer can pull you through, it's Captain Imrie. It ain't 'is fault 'e ain't R.N.R. yet."

And the venom in the mate's voice caused the Minister to glance at him in bewilderment.

"It will be a very close shave, sir," said the skipper in reply to Mr. Marlborough. "Boisjoli Point, Saint Peter's Isle, bearing off our starboard bow. But it will be a very close shave."

Something more important than the enemy's proximity ran in Imrie's mind. It stood upon his face.

His voice was strangely jubilant. His eyes sparkled with a peculiarly tense feeling. He looked upon the Minister as upon his prey.

But Mr. Marlborough was dead to this revelation of the searchlights.

“ You are, Imrie, ex-officer of His Majesty’s Navy ? ”

“ I am also the last commanding officer of the British Steamship Company’s *Berwick*—sunk off Flores.”

Imrie’s challenge to memory took Mr. Marlborough by the throat, as it were. For the moment he looked stupidly at him. Then his thick brows puckered as slowly he harked back in recollection.

. . . Yes. . . . An uncomfortable half-hour in the Commons about the loss of this liner. . . .

Astern, the approaching enemy threw a sighting shot that fell close off the coaster’s port bow.

On her forecastle a hand yapped fear and consternation. Exclamations and oaths burst from his mates. Gribbertson sprang to the rail, and cursed them into silence. But Captain Imrie was unheeding.

“ The B.O.C., of which you are the head, endorsed my parchment for the disaster,” he said, “ suspended me for two years.” And his enunciation took on a taste of steel. “ Not till after the Enquiry did I get evidence proving that I had not had a drop of liquor that day—that, too, the Gulf Stream, deflected by the southerly gales, had shoved me to the nor’ard, on Flores. . . . You refused in the Commons after a heated scene to reopen the Enquiry. ‘ It is a lesson,’ said you, ‘ to the non-abstainers in the Mercantile Marine. The sooner any indulgence in alcohol is stamped out of the British Marine the better.’ . . . The Admiralty made me resign my commission in the R.N.R.; my quartermaster, Gribbertson, there, followed me. And so ruined at home I drifted into this coasting trade in my own bottom. . . . Ah! You do remember . . . ”

The President of the Board of Commerce did not speak.

His hasty, inconsiderate temperament he felt was at last proving his Nemesis.

His face was cast in rigid lines, though his nether-lip

was twitching. His heavy, full-orbed eyes bore intently on Imrie, weighing his veracity.

A shell from the cruiser shattered the face of a near swell. Another burst just beyond the bows. Upheavals of spray deluged the waist and forecastle. The outcries from the panic-stricken hands sounded loud and menacing.

The mate threw a momentary look at the group behind him, and drew his Colt.

Captain Imrie's steely voice continued :

"You wrecked me. You and all your sort wreck England. The proper place for you is on board that German—after she has done what I am out for. You will have no chance then of effecting more mischief at home, and having us knuckle under to 'Stop-the-War.' "

"No ! Not mischief. . . . Every Minister is liable to err . . . I did in your case, I own. It is the price of office."

Even in this most dire extremity Mr. Marlborough slipped into the sententious touch of the hustings. His broken utterance he accompanied with little broken gestures that, though full of a certain dignity, seemed grotesque—ludicrous—silhouetted against the search-light's white glow.

"I ask you, ex-officer of the most honourable——"

Overhead flashed a blast of flame more terrible than the cruiser's eye. Downward and outward drove a myriad of splinters and the stifling fumes of exploding shell. In mad brute terror at being fired upon the coaster's hands rushed amidships.

Cursing and yelling for surrender they stormed upon the bridge.

"Guess, here's killings," roared the wheel, a New Orleans softhead. "Them blasted niggurs and pier-head-jumpers !"

"Keep your course," thundered the skipper.

He drove his fist into the face of the ear-ringed half-caste topping the ladder; and out of the corner of his eye saw the mate swing over the rail and drop athwart the hands swarming into the starboard alley-way, carrying the second officer off his feet. Gribbertson's bull-like voice raged above the din as he furiously laid about with the butt of his revolver.

A nigger flinging himself headlong from the ladder against Imrie's knees brought him down full stretch along the bridge; other hands threw themselves upon him cursing and raving. Desperately he haunched himself up on his right shoulder, and wrenched his Colt free. Above him bent an infuriated half-caste, his dirty-brown face with its flat, negroid features swollen with murder and insane fears. Imrie twisted the revolver into his cheek; but ere he could fire a hand struck the weapon aside; a broad white fist hit the mestee under the ear, and he dropped senseless.

"Not murder . . . not murder . . ." roared the Minister, in a great voice, as with the blows of one who knows the cunning of pugilistic fists he smote the assailants, and sent them aside reeling and coughing up blood.

In a step he was astride of the skipper.

Abaft a little of the *Caribbee's* stern the fast-fading darkness was riven by fire like a thunderbolt. The annihilating blast of the 8-inch shell, its drive of splinters and other small debris, swept across the bridge. Groans and piercing cries of pain spread in a horrible chorus. The coaster swerved twenty points to starboard, her rudder jammed in the wreck of her broken stern-frame.

From under her bows came a dull grating that shook the hull. Her engines made a few revolutions, then stopped. The stokehold blacks scrambled up out into the port alleyway in a hullabulloo of fright and terror.

Captain Imrie staggered to his feet, his face bruised and livid.

He was aware the enemy had switched off her light, for the dawn was growing apace, and primrose and blood-red streamers were shooting up over the eastern sea-rim. Beside him, Mr. Marlborough, bareheaded, his chin bleeding from an unstaunched sliver wound, was bending over a moaning deck-hand.

"She has struck, she has struck," the master jerked out hoarsely. "You saved my life, sir; I'd now willingly give it to make up for this. . . . But the Germans 'll have you."

For again in the grey of the morning the 280-pound explosive crashed out, tearing the coaster's forecastle into a smoking jagged gap, and opening up the forward deck—the derrick there ripping through her side with a deafening scrunch.

But the next second, out of the gloom in the north-north-west, whistled a projectile, countering the blow. Sternly in defence rang great guns' muffled reports.

Imrie hurrahed madly.

"The Frenchmen! The Frenchmen! We're just inside the Saintes' territorial waters—hard and fast on Pierre shoals. . . . Cabrit Island battery firing."

"Boom. . . . Boom . . ." pealed Creusot cannon in sullen defiance. The after funnel of the German fell.

And after firing two broadsides in return the enemy stood away to westward.

"But you have lost your all, Captain Imrie," the Minister protested, half an hour later on the coaster's bridge, his eyes fixed anxiously on the boats approaching from the near island. "Not only shall I have your character cleared in public, but also I must make amends privately, commensurate with your financial loss in this. . . . Thank God, the workers of both countries are not blood-guilty in this murderous business."

"No need for any money amends, sir," replied the skipper, working his binoculars westward. "Here comes the liner round from Basse-Terre; she is just topping

the sea-line. You'll soon be on board her—'Safe and sound.' "

"No, sir! Not a single penny!" Imrie repeated, taking the glasses from his eyes.

He chuckled grimly for some seconds.

Mr. Marlborough, puzzled, and in some measure affronted also, regarded him inquiringly.

"The underwriters'll pay for the smashing of her and the wounding of my hands," Imrie explained, with a triumphant wave of his left arm. "Their 'lines' on this vessel have given me a thundering lot of trouble to realise £10,000! But I have 'em now, thanks to 'running' you."

GUNS OF DESTINY

Z-I-P-ZZ-I-P. . . . ZZ-I-P. . . . Z-I-P-ZZ-I-P. . . .

In the wireless cabin of H.M.S. *Dolphin* the loud and violent sounds came at irregular intervals like a giant tearing cotton. But the telegraphist, with his cap tilted over his eyes to protect them from the electric's glare, appeared unaware of them.

Working the key of the transmitter, he was ringing the night-sky for miles around with the hertzian waves calling up British scouts.

Only for a second or two did he pause, when the stopper of the bridge voice-tube in the bulkhead, almost touching his right ear, blew out with a screech audible even above the chattering of the hard-driven destroyer.

"No, sir, nuthin'," he replied, "nuthin' at all come in from Ours or the enemy."

His lips twitched in grim irony. He had caught the faint echo of the Bridge's comment, uttered in anxiousness and suspense.

"It's Us that'll be shoved into It, if 'e gets 'alf a chance!" the telegraphist grunted to himself.

Again he assiduously pressed the handle of the long arm of brass in the middle of the transmitter. Again the *Dolphin's* call went forth, circling and recircling, magical and incessant.

ENGELHEIM IN THE IRISH SEA

ADMIRALTY TRICKED

These headlines had startled the great maritime centre of the west coast, late that evening. Alarm and

excitement had swelled along her many crowded streets. In Liverpool Bay, where every hour of peace brings its ship, and one-third of England's imports are floated to her shores, the waters now heaved unlit and desolate. They were furrowed only by the keels of vessels of war. Panic had at last paralysed the ganglions of Britain's sea-borne commerce. Liners were taking protection beneath the guns of Haulbowline, Pembroke, the Channel, and other British bases. Many vessels were making for the nearest neutral ports on the seaboard of Europe, to discharge and lay up, or be transferred to a neutral flag. But in this respect, irreparable loss had ensued to Germany's mercantile marine.

The night was black and starless.

With her oil-engines hurling her northward at thirty-eight knots, the scout stormed onwards—a sinister shadow of Death. From the heavy bow-sea she was raising, brine cascaded upon her turtle-back stem and enveloped the bridge in showers of spray. Astern, her wake vanished abruptly into the darkness.

Lieutenant Randall brushed the water off his goggles, and stared ahead for a few seconds; then, to rest his eyes, turned them astern.

“ . . . Must be closing fast with 'em,” he roared into the ear of his subordinate officer as on the destroyer heeling over the groundswell he swayed towards him. “ They managed to dupe us after all.”

“ Yes . . . duped us after all ! And us on the West Coast grumbling 'cause of being left out of It,” replied Sub-Lieutenant Collins. “ We might have known that if they got away from us, out of the Ems, this was to be expected.”

“ We have too few cruisers,” jerked out Randalls in answer.

He again wiped his goggles, and looked up-wind. Through the fine spray rising mist-like from the bows it was very difficult to penetrate the night ahead ; particles

of brine driving behind the sight-guards blinded the eye. Winking and spitting out a mouthful of salt water, the commanding officer edged along his tilting bridge.

His short lean features were somewhat concealed by the unsightly goggles and the peak of his waterproof. But in the dim illumination from the hooded binnacle-lamp Sub-Lieutenant Collins caught a glimpse of Randall's mouth and trenchant chin. Approach of the Real Thing had called up in him an intrepid nobility of visage and of figure that hitherto had been lacking. The hint of a slouch was gone from his lanky person.

Peril and the baffling night—stress of nervous tension and a sudden craving to hear the human voice—caused the young officer to edge closer.

"Enemy may be standing out again," he cried against the head-wind of the destroyer's passage.

"Perhaps! Anyhow we'll soon pick 'em up. . . . Soon pick 'em up. . . . They can't get away from this craft. She'd run past an aeroplane!"

The assurance and truth in the commanding officer's voice came to Collins as thing of reality. He shot a glad look at him.

Flashes of pure light, colourless as moonshine, were now playing from the searchlights of the Coastal Defence. The beams shot and wheeled and rested along the waters of the Liverpool Approach, turning the tips of the swells into molten silver and illuming mistily the hollows between.

At this activity shown ashore a disconcerting thought came to Randall.

"Yes, it would be very awkward," he muttered, "it would! . . . Play hell with us too!"

Prying and relentless in their revelations the shafts of light shifted slowly, crossing and recrossing as they fell away to westward. Then of a sudden they vanished while streaming up to the zenith to signal far-distant lookouts.

Canting and swaying with quick seesaw motions, the destroyer rushed onwards.

Just then a streak darker than the night loomed low off the starboard bow, and disappeared across the warcraft's course. Randall jammed the binoculars into his eyes. Low hails from the lookouts rang simultaneously.

In the starboard compartment of the brightly lit engine-room, the chief artificer had his eyes glued on the telegraph dials. He was intently listening, too, to the purring of the motors alongside him. Spark and throttle levers had long since been pushed up notch by notch till the oil-engines' churring notes told of exultant speed.

Of a sudden the gong pealed out, the dial-finger fell to 'Slow Ahead.' Then again the harsh metallic notes crashed forth, and the enamelled pointer fled back to 'Full Speed Ahead' almost as the E.R.A. had racked his levers. The destroyer heeled as she stood sharp to port.

"We're into it," he jerked out to a rating who was passing Number Two carburetter. "Stand by, Frankell, to carry on."

Frankell, with close nipped lips and gleaming eyes, nodded an emphatic assent.

On deck the crews of the torpedo tubes crouched expectant at their posts.

The destroyer was now in line with dim shadows off her starboard quarter. Apparitional—terrible in their spectral might—the enemy's column was steaming at full speed into Liverpool Bay, making for the attack.

Lieutenant Randall strove to make out the Germans' strength.

Qualms hitherto unknown to him possessed his body. To its tremor, his heart throbbed and thundered. His ears sang in the surging of his blood.

Of a sudden the coastal searchlights sundered the darkness.

The far-flung beams streamed out in a blinding white haze, and against it the destroyer was silhouetted—low-lying—sinister. The next instant broke out terrible flame and fury. About her rained innumerable blobs of blinding fire, to the screech of projectiles and the hiccough of shell.

A missile crunched into her amidships, opening up the hull like a thing of papier-mache, and cutting down men of the near torpedo tube with a myriad splinters. But to her commanding officer had come savage and deliberate exultation.

Frowning like a madman as he stood low on his bridge, whistle betwixt his teeth and hand clenching the wheel, he endeavoured to count the enemy's units.

A projectile blasted apart his forecastle, and it was turned into a smoking heap of scrap-iron. Bursting shell blew in the starboard side of the wardroom, and rent open the deck. Some one shrieked in his agonies—his limbs mashed and shattered. A voice broke into wild curses at him.

"Keep your heads, men. D——n you, keep your heads. It's nothing yet," raged Sub-Lieutenant Collins.

Then shrill pealed the bridge's whistle, and torpedoes forward and amidships were discharged.

Randall was obsessed with battle. He saw red.

His hands and face were bleeding from flesh wounds, his uniform slashed and torn by sliver and shell-segment. But only of the belching steel-clad leviathans was he conscious. And his entire being was concentrated on their annihilation.

Abeam of him, the serried flashing shot up into one vast volcano of crimson flame, that made the near night blood-red. The 25,000-ton hull of the *Ersatz Hannover*, torpedoed in her port after shell-room, buckled in two, then parted asunder in a gigantic upheaval of smoke and flame and mountainous sea.

Sweat and blood were blinding Randall. Desperately

he hailed the deck, and out of the sprawling bodies there a bluejacket staggered to his feet. With both hands pressed on the dripping wound in his left side he took the hail, and reeled to the wireless cabin.

As he reached the hatchway a projectile snipped off his head, and the quivering trunk remained half-bent, then tumbled down, bespattering the cabin below. Threads of gore spurted on the telegraphist's face, but he did not know.

With hands clutching the transmitter, he was straining his ears for the message from the bridge.

In his mental throes the blood had ebbed from his face, leaving the skin mottled and ghastly white. He looked a grotesque thing. His features were sharp, and in their contorted expression gave him the appearance of a death's-head.

Again the destroyer lurched when a missile devastated her engine-room. Sooty flame burst through hatchway and ruptured deck, for the oil of the wrecked motors had caught fire. Out of the inferno Frankell threw himself on deck, face-down in awful agony. But, greedy of its prey, a fiery fringe swallowed him.

Lieutenant Randall had leaped from the bridge.

The fire was roaring up. Its flames licked the coaming of the hatchway, as the disabled vessel gyrated about like she was seeking escape from the tornado of destruction; the wireless cabin was filled with its stifling black smoke and noxious fumes.

Randall gasped out his report; and with head sunk between his shoulders, the telegraphist, blind-eyed, piteous in his torture, jerked the handle of his transmitter. Once more the electric spark fled between the brass balls of the antennæ. . . .

In the head-quarters of the Liverpool Defence, the commander-in-chief and one of his staff were standing beside the wireless receiver in Central Signal Station.

Snapped the C.I.C. in irritation, "Engelheim is

screened in mystery as usual; and our Navy men don't seem to be able to come in touch with them at all. Most damnable, this lack of scouting cruisers! And no information spells certain disaster to Liverpool."

"Three-fourths of our vessels are in the North Sea, and now the enemy are turning our unprotected flank, sir!" exclaimed the staff-officer. "That faint bruit of firing in the north-west has not died down. It must——"

He ceased of a sudden, for the tape machine was now moving in its own mysterious way. The ticking printer began to set down, clear and incontrovertible, on its riband of white paper the message circling landward.

"Code letter H, sir, yes, our call-up," the telegraphist exclaimed in a suppressed, excited voice. "... Eight vessels . . . thirty-two miles . . . north-west by——"

The little brass box had stopped its purring. The white riband no more unwound itself.

Swiftly the operator worked its transmitter handle, and in six-inch flashes the electric current ripped and crackled between the spark-balls, to pass along the guiding wire and ring up the night-sky.

Again he tried . . . again . . . and yet again. But there came no reply.

The low mutterings of far-off guns had ceased.

THE MISFEASANCE OF CAPTAIN NARBOROUGH

"THIS treachery disgraces the ship—it throws odium on the whole Service," Captain Narborough jerked out. "It is a most damnable affair, Mr. Carphin!"

Though the commanding officer of the armoured cruiser spoke in a suppressed voice, on his heavy face feelings of ire and indignation stood high. Impetuously he struck the Commander-in-Chief's marconigram with the back of his right hand.

It occurred to his senior executive officer, standing with him alongside the chart-table, that Captain James Narborough, M.V.O., D.S.O., in the complexus of his emotions had wholly forgotten he himself some years ago had had a 'most damnable affair,' bringing the Service into disagreeable publicity.

"Only Sub-Lieutenant Tybout, sir, and two seamen were ashore at Wick for the mails," he returned, "and it is unthinkable that Tybout, at any rate, is in the enemy's pay. . . . No, I'm wrong, sir. The canteen man came to me just before the pinnacle was getting away; short of urgent stores he said he was, so I passed him ashore."

"A great pity we hadn't time to ship the reserve lot of them for the fleet before hostilities," Narborough blurted in an uneasy voice.

To the commander, watching him with a baleful eye, it seemed that his superior officer was on the horns of a dilemma. But, then, Carphin's was a very deep-rooted bias. A bias—to term it politely—which had existed

since he had been a midshipman and Narborough the senior sub-lieutenant of the *Royal Oak's* gunroom.

"Fall in pinnace's crew for examination. Send Tybout to me. . . . A most damnable affair!"

"And about Zaccare, sir?"

It was now the eyes of the two officers met, challenging, in the gloom of the screened lights.

The next moment Captain Narborough, his lips moving as if in a silent imprecation, again regarded the wireless slip under the hooded electric illuming the chart section.

"I'll handle him along with the men," he replied harshly as if resenting some tacit imputation. "Send all his papers and correspondence up to me immediately."

But Narborough consciously did not lift his eyes to his subordinate's salute on Carphin turning away. He was well enough aware of the half-veiled contumely on the commander's blunt face.

"Kept his hatred alive since I dirked him years ago in the old *Royal Oak*," he muttered contemptuously, "but now it is becoming a serious matter."

Savagely he stared at the Flagship's marconigram.

Yes. It was irrefutable that the enemy's information as to the northerly strength reinforcing the British Fleet now off Heligoland must have emanated from someone in his personnel. No other vessel had come in on the land nor any private communications as yet been permitted landward in the Admiralty's endeavour after absolute secrecy.

If Peitro Zaccare was guilty?

Captain Narborough's low, broad forehead twitched as a mental spasm shook his self-command. He saw a vista, ugly and menacing, of himself at stake, and his career ended. He that with a great and resolute joy was now expectant of the hostile guns shrank in dread from the revelations ensuing on Whitehall's renewed inquiries.

"Good God, it would ruin me," he murmured, passing a hand over his face as if wiping off beads of sweat; "and

Carphin, I'm confident, has some surmise as to his identity. . . . Ruin me absolutely, after the questions the other year."

"Sounds of motor craft coming down on port bow, sir," the officer of the watch reported hurriedly, his face thrust between the curtains screening the doorway. And grabbing his binoculars off the log desk, the Head of the ship sprang out on to the bridge.

The night was calm, but charged with a confusing blackness. Through a rift in the canopy of vapours came a glimpse of the stars and of the old moon lying on her back. As out of the north-west the armoured cruiser swooped down on Heligoland, beneath the near darkness the low-hunching swell was only to be seen when massing into broad white knuckles or cresting summits to the thrust of the current. Beyond, all was a black void.

"Heligoland throwing out motor craft. . . . Germans think they can effect all kinds of things with all kinds of craft," the C.O. grunted derisively to the officer of the watch as they strained eyes and ears ahead. "I don't hear anything, Sabin—absolutely nothing. You tried Submarine Signals?"

"Yes, sir. Forepeak hears nothing, and the look-outs, topsides, haven't picked up any sounds. I distinctly caught the chugging of a motor—off the port bow I took it to be."

"Your imagination has ditched your judgment this time, Sabin," Captain Narborough rejoined brusquely. "Can't be too wideawake though. We must all keep very much alive or they'll be dropping on the top of us before we know."

He put down his binoculars and looked around searchingly. Forward, the top of the fore barbette was just visible with the canted muzzles of its aerostatic quick-firers and the 9.2-inch guns. On the bridge the burly officer of the watch had turned away to speak to the signalman, who was hovering about the voice-tubes and

telephones; at the wheel loomed the vigilant quartermaster and the helmman, while alert and instant-handed stood the men by the telegraphs. In barbette and casemate, and by ammunition hoist and passage, the C.O. knew the crew were lying at their posts, with one ear open for the bugle's shrill notes.

To him envisaging all it appeared as something incredible—something too preposterous even to imagine—that one of them was a traitor.

But—the Maltese?

Captain Narborough bit his lip. He told himself, not for the first time, that he had been practically blackmailed into silence. Out of his very letters during the last few months would arise his severest condemnation by Public and Admiralty alike, for that evidence showed his consciousness of wrong-doing.

Throwing a keen look over the night sea to port and starboard, he strained his hearing for a little, then crossed the bridge. He looked down abaft, past the huge, droning, blistered funnels with their outpouring from hard-pressed stokeholds, and frowned to himself.

The commander and ship's police were already at work.

When Sub-Lieutenant Tybout saluted, Captain Narborough turned to address him. But suddenly the Bridge sprang to the rail on a shouting ringing out, to swell louder the next moment with more urgent cries of 'Man overboard.' Engines were reversed and stopped; and the starboard cutter dropped into the sea that was ghostly with seething, boiling water from the lashing of the propellers. Buoys had instantly been flung out, their chloride of calcium lights burning bright amidst clouds of smoke.

"Canteen man thrown himself overboard; commander in after him."

Captain Narborough repeated the information in a sharpened voice that caused the officers near by to glance at him. But the darkness saved his anguished face.

"Switch on after starboard searchlight, Mr. Sabin. We must just chance the enemy sighting us. . . . Can't run any risk of losing Mr. Carphin."

Then, fearing his voice had betrayed him, he launched out curses in due emphaticness at the unforeseen. But a horrid chill settled on his heart. He saw himself of a certainty arraigned in disgrace and opprobrium. It was no presentiment now. . . . Ah, years ago, if he had curtly ignored Pellicano's advances and turned him out of the *Dauntless* canteen for malpractices !

"Tybout," he interjected abruptly, adjusting his binoculars astern as the carbons of the after starboard searchlight shot out their wedge of downcast light, "carry on. Fall out pinnacle's crew. This act of the canteen man speaks for you all."

A speck floating alongside a smoking buoy about a quarter of a mile away indicated the commander.

Captain Narborough strained his sight to discover if he had saved Zaccare ; and a suffocating feeling took him when he reflected that the loss of the canteen manager would sweep away all his old suspense and fears.

Just then the Bridge noted the cutter, black in the shaft of cold-blue brilliancy, to be pulling for her mark ; and now playing the light upon her would blind her men.

"Yes. Switch off searchlight," the commanding officer rasped, "cutter sighted 'em. Show a light low down for her."

His voice was controlled, but innerly he was praying insanely, impiously, that the Maltese be lost—not Carphin. His hatred Narborough foolishly regarded as something passive.

"They don't seem to have got the canteen man, sir," said someone at hand, as over all fell the pall of night impenetrable by the eye.

"We've risked enough for him, with the enemy swarming around. Recall the cutter, Mr. Sabin, if the commander is saved," Captain Narborough browbeated in

reply. "This vessel is of more value to the nation than her canteen manager!"

Narborough's instinct for self-preservation had stormed down conscience.

His mouth grim-set, he leaned over the bridge-rail, and, ear and eye vigilant, watched the return of the cutter.

Thoughts came insistently to him of Jose Pellicano, now dead, and the old canteen scandal on board the *Dauntless*, then of Zaccare, and the consequences he had implied if disqualifying information had been lodged with the now all-potent Inspector of Canteens.

Bitterly did Narborough tell himself the Whitehall officials themselves had long winked at irregularities. Had not ships then been prinked out, spick-and-span, with extra gold-leaf, new paint and polished metal-work—and neither at the Admiralty's nor the officers' expense.

The cutter surged alongside. She hooked on, voices rang out, and the falls were married; a pipe twittered, and the waiting bluejackets to the thud of their scurrying feet and the creaking of blocks put weight into their hoist, and swiftly ran the dripping boat up to her davit-heads. Telegraph gongs crashed below; and rapidly the cruiser gathered way again.

Her commanding officer turned up the collar of his coat and pulled down his cap as if to obscure his face. Taciturn, merciless, in this fight for his survival, he stood beside the officer of the watch, awaiting the report.

Were Zaccare lost, he was well content to suffer the pangs of retribution.

As he anxiously searched the night for the hostilities which might so suddenly belch forth destruction, a satisfaction—inhuman, saturnine—arose in him. His was the knowledge that the inculpatory letters were of a surety within his grasp.

These damning evidences—not only of the financial transaction ensuing on Mrs. Narborough cumbering him heavily with the millstone of debt, but also of their

furniture having been shipped to the foreign station by Pellicano, in return for that promise of the *Dauntless* canteen which himself had so vigorously denied in the Admiralty's private inquiry—they now were his own to destroy. Now, after all these years!

Captain Narborough felt that he had been living on the top of a superheated cordite magazine with momentary explosion in prospect. He speculated as to how much Zaccare in his impudent over-confidence had ever let slip. The shame of his situation tortured him.

"No sounds of your motor craft again, Mr. Sabin," he exclaimed, bending all his energies anew to his duties.

"No, sir. Not yet. I am still confident I heard it." But the commanding officer had moved away towards the ladder.

There the commander loomed in the semi-darkness, apparitional as some avenging shade. Squelching wet at every step he joined Captain Narborough, who was holding in his breath, stifling the moments of intolerable suspense.

But on hearing Carphin's report a revulsion surged into him.

"Canteen man broke away from the master-at-arms, he did, eh. . . . To save him, you have risked a life of paramount value to the ship, especially at present," said he, in trenchant, brutal tones. "Not a doubt now but Zaccare is the leakage. Sick-bay to send him up, for the report must be got away to the Flagship smartly. . . . Mr. Carphin, jump below for a change. Nothing coming along."

The commander stepped out of the way of the master-at-arms and several of the ship's police carrying the canteen manager's desk and other effects into the chart-house. He hesitated, taken aback by the C.O.'s solicitous care of him. His suspicions took on a larger and more definite aspect.

". . . Sooner not risk anything, sir."

"What! You risk nothing," flooked Captain Narborough.

His words were stabs at the senior executive, for he had kindled, detecting the obstinacy and distrust in Carphin's tones. But the next second he could have bitten his tongue out at his indiscretion in barbing the retort.

As he paused to speak to the officer of the watch, and watched, too, the commander's broad back disappear down the ladder into the nether gloom, his surmise as to Carphin's knowledge concerning Zaccare hardened into a certainty, which, however, was assuaged by his feeling of approaching security. Suppression of the letters by craft occasioned him no concern. It sweetened him, too, to think that in this desperate essay to guard himself the canteen man had not been lost, and the dull thrum of his swiftly revolving engines, deep in the great steel hull, he felt with more pleasure than if the Maltese had been left astern to perish.

But, on the threshold of the charthouse, dismay and trepidation attacked him.

Letting the curtains slip into place behind him he stopped of a sudden: he looked oddly at the canteen manager's gear. The navigating lieutenant, who was at hand, worrying over the chart, glanced up in conjunction when ordered to stand by on the bridge; Captain Narborough's voice told of an instant heat of anger; of vehement hopes routed.

Whelmed by his sense of defeat he was hardly aware of the navigator passing outside. With parted lips and frowning forehead he remained motionless, staring at Zaccare's things.

"My God! My enemy has done this," he ejaculated in a husky undertone, to look about him the next moment, afraid he had been overheard.

Over the locks of the inkstained desk of brass-bound mahogany, and of the two battered, japanned tin cases, seals had been affixed.

Narborough's eyes bore furiously upon them as if to sunder the wax, and extract their damning contents forthwith.

He writhed in the lightnings of guilt's thunder.

Too late had he understood after closing the transaction years ago with Pellicano that in the Maltese's knavery on board the old *Dauntless*—in sales to the bluejackets of margarine as butter, of old tinned goods relabelled as new, of rancid bacon, addled eggs, and other bad stores as fresh stock—in his wrongly figured mess bills and general malpractices—had been the chief source of the canteen firm's affluence. His own disavowal of any unclean hands then would be contradicted now in his own correspondence.

His heart sickened as he comprehended Carphin's design to force it before the Official Eye. The thought of its outcome went through him like a knife.

On his ear, quick for the slightest stir in the night, came the commander's hurried footstep, and he faced about.

"You have had them sealed?" he breathed gustily, gesturing with his left hand to the gear.

"Yes, sir. I ordered the paymaster to do so, to keep the papers intact till they have been gone through in the canteen man's presence, and listed—otherwise, sir, he might say, they were tampered with."

Carphin's voice was restrained and equable. His dark eyes gleamed, and on his face with its high cheek-bones and retreating forehead flashed a glimpse of but indifferently disguised triumph.

In Captain Narborough there sprang up that same old desire to welt him, which, long years ago, had prompted his dirking in the battleship's gunroom. It struck him for the first time that he had underrated the commander as a personal enemy—an omission only natural to the commanding officer's temperament.

The two men were Dame Nature's antitheses.

"The Maltese, only a common informer," the C.O. retorted sharply. "You may think him of especial importance to Whitehall, eh?"

"I do, sir. . . . Pellicano's son!"

Captain Narborough glowered at him with a sudden sinking at heart. . . . Did he know of the letters also?

"Pellicano's son, you say?"

"Yes, his son and partner," rang the answer, quickly, grimly. "As far back as the *Dauntless* canteen scandal, he was representing his firm at Bizerta, and I quite accidentally ran across him when our Mediterranean squadron put in there, about the same date. He is under the impression he is safe 'cause he is not known to be the Pellicano firm. . . . I know he is, sir."

At these words, which the commander delivered with a vindictive snap, Captain Narborough braced himself together. It was with difficulty he showed a smooth face. From the bridge a sudden word or two echoed indistinctly, and his heart leaped up welcoming any respite—even the murder of overpowering guns. But the next second the quiet settled down again.

". . . Think, then, his papers should show up much?"

Vainly the commanding officer sought for a degree of indifference in his voice.

"I am certain. The master-at-arms told me a week ago, the canteen man had been boasting, when he was in liquor, that he could get a couple of hundred pounds from an influential quarter for a few letters he had in his desk."

"The enemy's cleverness in choosing their tools not showing to advantage in Zaccare, at any rate," Narborough jibed, covering his acute unrest. "You'll run through these tin cases of his, Mr. Carphin: I'll take his desk. . . . Now to the dirty business. . . . Smartly, too, for the Bridge needs us both."

As the canteen man was escorted into the charthouse the C.O. eyed him sternly; yet despair and self-recrimination were gnawing at his self-command.

In the first glance he recognized his accuser was before him. . . . Ah, the folly of his own wrong-doing. . . .

Venom distilled itself from every part of the small, bilious Maltese with his hiked-up shoulders and ghastly sallow face. Venom blazed in his black eyes. Venom bristled from the hunched bearing of his sleek person, which had been clothed in a dry rig two sizes too large. He was the very flesh-and-blood of raging virulence.

"You are arrested on the charge of having imparted information to the enemy," the commanding officer said stiffly to the Maltese, his eye stubbornly resisting Zaccare's furious blinking gaze. "Your gear will be gone through first. Time enough for examination of you afterwards. . . . Anything to say?"

The apple of the prisoner's throat worked as if he had a great difficulty in swallowing. His under jaw trembled. In the violence of his fears and fury at those crushing him he could scarce find tongue.

"Noting . . . say . . ." he muttered incoherently, in a guttural voice. "no, noting . . . say . . ." For a few moments Zaccare's mouth moved as if he was masticating his words. Nervously he licked his twitching lips. ". . . In the desk, per Dio . . . I say, remember it. . . . Not save me. . . . You! . . . It is you——"

He volleyed forth a torrent of hybrid language, gabbling at the pitch of his voice. Promptly the master-at-arms clapped a hand over his mouth.

The canteen man's terrible words struck Captain Narborough like his death-blow. Breathing heavily, and aware of the commander's sardonic scrutiny as Carphin turned to burst open one of the tin cases, the C.O. bent over the desk, and fumblingly parted its seal. There returned on him, with appalling lucidity, the impossibility—now—of suppressing the correspondence or preventing it from being listed for official information and prompt action thereon.

The commander had him entrapped. He was to drain to the dregs his cup of ignominy.

Sounds of voices out on the bridge, of repeated hails from the lookouts, of something in the air that was foreign to his trained ear took his attention as he threw open the desk; and he strained every faculty to catch the meaning of them. An exclamation from the commander caused Narborough to look in his direction.

"Here is a cypher-sheet, sir," Carphin reported, separating it from a number of papers, "and also a receipt for a wire sent from Pulteneytown, Wick, that afternoon we took off mails. This——"

A peremptory hail from the bridge checked his voice. The two officers darted from the charthouse.

The aerial scouts of Heligoland base, having satisfied themselves that the British squadrons were not advancing in force but first throwing out cruisers in reconnaissance, were returning. Swooping down at a high speed, the buzzing of their motors almost instantly heightened into a low, shrill roar, as they paused and poised overhead for the attack.

Even as Captain Narborough sprang out into the open a huge V-shaped cone of molten white light flashed up abaft, and to a deep thunderous explosion the great ship heaved drunkenly. For an instant he saw the funnels and after sighting-top and running gear outlined sharp and black against the dazzling light. But the next, the cruiser's searchlights clove the upper night into day.

With invincible courage she was facing her winged foes.

Her C.O.'s voice pealed out, and in his upturned eyes came a glimpse of dark wings hovering almost above the bridge. From the bird-like body between them he saw something drop into the abyss. Snatching hold of the commander, who was dashing past him towards the ladder, Narborough threw himself forward on his face pulling Carphin with him. As he fell, from behind them an outspreading gush of blinding light struck like a

detonation through the half-gloom beneath the search-lights' radiance; his perception registered their two shadows, crisp and grotesque in their fall; and then consciousness was overpowered by the blast and impact of the exploding bomb.

Swept headlong by the tremendous shock, Narborough was jolted awake on landing on his side on the shelter deck. He was aware of the ear-splitting clamour of the aerostatic quickfirers; was aware their shells, bursting, had broken the broad lateral pinions of one of the monoplane, that was falling, tumbling over and over to its doom.

He was aware, too, of the charthouse wrecked and burning furiously. But in this crisis he had lost all thought of self.

Bugle-notes pierced the din, clear and resurgent, and some of the fire squad passed at the double, trailing their hoses.

Captain Narborough reeled to his knees.

"Gawd!" cried one of the stokers stopping, "'ere's the Old Man an' the Bloke wiv 'im—knocked out a bit. . . . Some of the Bridge alive then. . . ."

Already the surviving monoplane was seeking to escape by mounting higher, swooping and rising in a wavy line. But around and beneath her flashed the cirri of flame from bursting shells.

Gingerly did Captain Narborough touch his contused face with the tips of his right-hand fingers as, standing beside the broken rail to starboard on his scarred and blackened bridge, he eyed in the first grey shoots of dawn the carpenter's crew knocking together something of a charthouse. Aft, the force of the first bomb had but temporarily jammed the turntable of the barbette and bent the deck structure. Forward, the second missile had shattered the face of the superstructure, flattened the port sighting-hood of the fore barbette, and demolished the charthouse and bridge fixings.

" . . . Lucky we weren't sent into Kingdom Come with the rest of them up there, Mr. Carphin," was his remark to the commander, whose face was bandaged and left arm in a sling. " Everything wiped out here by their second bomb."

" You saved me, sir," Carphin rejoined, in a husky voice, and looking the C.O. full in the face. " . . . Me, too. . . . I tell you plainly, sir, I have——"

" I have known it, Carphin, ever since that dirking," Narborough interrupted, " but we of the Navy must stand or fall together, . . . Stand or fall together. . . . There *were* letters of mine in that desk?—you know?"

Carphin nodded. He paused as if making up his mind for confession.

" Yes! While they were first handling Zaccare, I made sure the correspondence was there. . . . God forgive me for it all—trying to down you."

The navigating lieutenant, who was officer of the watch, out of the corner of his eye, saw the two senior executive silently shake hands, their faces tense with feeling, and wondered what had been afoot between them.

MARGINAL SAFETY—NIL

THE grey haze of morning still hung over the Firth of Forth, obscuring the Granton shore to the south and the coast of Fife to the northward. Seaward, the horizon lay under trailing skirts of mist against which Inchkeith Lighthouse stood phantom-like. In the soft wind, that blew from the Pentlands, came the smell of autumn and green woods and tilled lands. Already the smoke from the early breakfast fires of Edinburgh and suburbs were drifting down it in webs and streaks, to thicken the vapours cloaking the city's low-lying environs toward the coastline.

On board submarine D 4 her commanding officer, seated on the little collapsible bridge, turned from looking Edinburgh-ward, and stared into the offing, where it was just possible to make out the inshore cruiser reinforcing the submarine defence. Some way ahead of D 4, thumbnail blobs slightly rising and falling like porpoises off her port and starboard bows indicated consorts 6, 7, and 8. Beyond the low haunch of Inchkeith two armoured cruisers formed the seaward head of the fan-shaped line of the defence.

D 4, floating light, was going slowly seaward, almost in mid-channel, while her mechanics made good a defect in her forward trimming tank.

Lieutenant Holdsworth's gaze returned to the swelling sides and tapering ends of his war-machine. The lines on his tall forehead became ridged when he reflected on what might burst upon them at any moment.

"I don't like this wireless jam!" he grunted in undertone, "but nothing's infallible. If the Forth is rushed—

Jove, what a mark. . . . Edinburgh!—unless the under water craft strike home first.”

Just then he caught his breath with a gulp, and grabbing his binoculars, thrust them to his eyes.

“*Hampshire* stoppin’ two steamers bound up-stream, sir.”

“I see them, I see them,” was his answer to the lookout, who away forward on the narrow bridge of deck was staring seaward, both hands hollowed about his eyes.

“By Gad! Do you hear that?”

Lieutenant Tarrant, second-in-command, had suddenly halted half in and half out of the hatchway just as he was gaining the deck. He did not reply to Holdsworth but stood listening, head inclined to the direction whence the muffled peals and heavy reports were issuing.

Just then the cruiser threw a shot athwart the merchantmen, that had not slowed down.

As if panic-stricken, they held up-channel at full speed.

“It is them at last, sir,” exclaimed Tarrant, finding his voice. “No mistaking the meaning of that racket away seaward—these steamers, too, skeedaddling for all they’re worth!”

Almost the next moment the *Hampshire* seemed to leap forward, then bore up towards the merchantmen. Her port broadside opened out on them as they raced up the Forth in line ahead. The leading vessel went sky-high in a many-tongued geyser of flame and water, and her mate was rent asunder to a dull detonation, and a monstrous toadstool of reddish-brown smoke gushing from her erupted holds.

On board D 4, as in her consort’s activity sprang into action. Ahead the flagship of the submarine flotilla swiftly signalled instructions.

“Yes, we’ve got the risk that for’ard trimming tank defect. Enemy has evidently tried to get at Rosyth with their d—d mine ships. . . . We’ll hold ’em up. But, God help Edinburgh.”

If the face of Lieutenant Holdsworth showed traces of excitement, hints of incipient flurry, his voice was cool and firm in authority.

One by one the men on deck scaled the conning-tower, and stepped below. Holdsworth left the bridge, and the last seaman on deck struck it and followed his mates. But his C.O. remained standing in the top of the conning-tower.

The greyness to eastward was now parting, showing peeps of the clear silver sky of early morning. Yet out of it there were now curving in terribly portentous succession the projectiles from battle squadrons invisible to him, to drop in blinks of fire about the two cruisers. Landward, incendiary bombs were already falling on the docks and shipping of Leith, where in a few minutes the lower end of Constitution Street was to burst into flames.

The enemy had opened the bombardment at long range.

As yet the naval base at Rosyth, being still in the contractor's hands, the defence of the Firth of Forth and of the capital of Scotland had been delayed for the "incorporation of the most modern and most powerful armament practicable." In 1908 the British War Office had stripped Leith forts of heavy guns and rendered Inchkeith useless as a defence of the Forth on the grounds of their obsolescence in modern warfare.

Serene and richly dowered, Edinburgh smiled upon the morning.

The upper parts of the city lay bathed in the pellucid atmosphere peculiar to the northern clime, though her lower environs were still obscured by the haze. Arthur's Seat stood out clear against the pale blue heavens; and between it and the waters of the Forth, the shoulder of the Calton Hill with its midget-like monuments; and further westward the Old Town with its piles of buildings and its antiquated castle that for five hundred years had overlooked Scotland from the Moorfoots to the Ochils.

As Lieutenant Holdsworth turned his binoculars on the capital he thought of his relations in Moray Place. As they now stood before their dressing-tables they were being startled by the Hideous Thing Itself. And the hubbub and crushing at the railway stations, and the mad rush inland. . . . The devastated streets, and houses in flames. . . . The poor and the helpless, the dying and the dead, huddled, contorted. Ay, the hashed bodies beneath the ruins of that which only a few minutes before had been their warm and established home. . . .

A feeling flashed up in Holdsworth, then passed, which he had not felt since he had been invalided for sunstroke three years previous—just as if everything were topsy-turvy.

Forward and aft, as the submarine settled down, white plumes of spray burst from the submerged vents, through which the air was being forced by the flooding of her ballast tanks. And a spasm of overmastering revulsion took him at having to fight cribbed and cramped inside the steel shell, and blinded by the deep's crepuscular twilight.

Horrors, hitherto absent while he had been juggling with the titanic forces under his control, flashed across his brain. When the hatches closed behind him with a dull metallic thud he felt as if he was entering his tomb. The screws sealing them hermetically rasped with painful distinctness; and he raged at himself for straining his ears to catch the sound.

The sensation of helpless imprisonment acutely assailed him, together with a wild desire to fight in the upper world where light and movement were.

Gritting his teeth, he steadied himself.

Overhead, the North Sea shouldered its swells with monotonous regularity, hiding D 4 with the exception of the tip of her periscope, that reflected the near waters on its little table by the steering-wheel. When her commanding officer looked ahead through the glass scuttle

pierced in the rim of the conning-tower all was dim grey twilight till the roll of water heaved astern.

From the periscope table came the report :

“ Destroyers retiring, sir.”

The surviving destroyers, crushed by the weight of projectiles, were making for shelter up-river. The nearest of them surged past—a sinking coffin, her forecastle torn open to the water-line, her hull a mere gnarled mass of scrap-iron.

But Holdsworth gave her little attention. His eye was riveted on the cruisers.

The enemy, keeping in mind that the Scottish capital could not shift, was systematically and with splendid precision effecting the end in view. That was—to achieve the ‘moral,’ the nervous, shock of great-gun fire on a civilian populace lacking restraint and self-discipline. Over the calm Forth their shells whistled and purred. Some of them, like balls of cotton-wool to Holdsworth, fell about the *Argyllshire* and the *Perth*, as they reluctantly fell back.

One of the woolly things seemed to melt in a little puff of white smoke against the *Argyllshire’s* port quarter ; and the next second she was gyrating wildly like a wounded live thing. A cone of dark brown smoke rose from her after parts. When the lieutenant looked for her on the next swell passing she was staggering northward heading evidently for cover under the Kinghorn guns.

But the *Hampshire* and the *Perth*, though battered, the latter with her upper deck wreathed in smoke and flame from the shattered funnels, were still firing stubbornly.

They were seeking to break down the enemy’s protection against the submarine attack.

Under the cover of the hostile guns motor launches were steaming in a half-circle formation up the estuary, and towing submerged mines athwart the channel.

A great shell punched through a gaping wound on the *Perth’s* quarter and burst out her side there. She heeled

on the gaping wound. Her decks became steep and steeper. She sank beneath a huge corona of smoke and steam.

But D 4's commanding officer was unconscious of everything except the mine boats rising rapidly into his ken.

Quickened by the devilry of war, the maggot in his blood mounted to his brain.

A fiery and animal rage rose up in him at the enemy's ingenuity.

In the near distance there shot up a low fountain of spray, and in it whirled about bodies and the wreckage of D 7 and 8. The heavy concussions travelling through the water warned D 4 of her consorts' doom.

Instinctively Holdsworth's hand sought the steering telegraph. And again, as in his craft's toppling slant the waters rushed past, suffocating and blinding, a craving for freedom of eye and action took possession of him.

Into the twilight ahead swiftly loomed two big pear-drops connected by cross tackle and trailing gear, their proportions and mazy outlines distorted by the refraction in the water. The blood rushed to the officer's head. Something twanged in his brain. A sensation invaded his being, and gave him buoyancy and freedom.

In a shock of surprise it came to him that his craft was underwater, not soaring above the mines.

Even as their 'catch-all' grazed the nose of the submarine the two launches towing the mine-gear were lifted on the breast of the incoming swell. The mines swayed upward, and their gear straggled past its belly-ing steel net almost catching the tip of her periscope tube.

But the lieutenant had sprung down the ladder. Tarrant glanced, white-faced, at him, and made room for him by the wheel and instruments. Then horror and amazement blanched him whiter.

"We attack overhead, Tarrant. An extraordinary mistake!"

From the second-in-command came a husky sound like the rasping of a saw. Rigidity froze his features. His eyes clung to Holdsworth's exulting face, as if mere vision could calm and control him.

"Yes," snapped the C.O., "we'll sink 'em from overhead. Hydroplane-submarine. . . . She'll fly, oh, she'll fly all right."

"Yes," replied the second-in-command, "that's the way. But we'll have to let her dive first and come up on t'other side, clear of their gun-fire; and then we'll drop on them. . . . Quick, sir, to the tubes. Enemy's sixth and seventh in line with our fire. . . . Two thousand eight hundred yards. . . . Quick, sir!"

The commanding officer looked at him, half puzzled, and half in menace. Then crouching low, he darted through the little hatchway in the bulkhead giving into the torpedo chamber.

The eyes of the men in the conning cabin followed him.

Cried one in a thin, reedy voice:

"My Gawd, 'e 's struck looney!"

"Shut your d——d mouth," Tarrant hurled at him.

"Stand by, lads, and we'll secure him."

That instant came a shock, infinitesimal yet perceptibly sharp, as D4's torpedoes were discharged.

"Steady with the rudders, Smith; steady with the rudders."

These words rang imperatively from the second-in-command. His eyes were riveted on the clinometer and pressure gauges.

And so delicate and hazardous a matter is the buoyancy of a submarine, so small her margin of safety, that a dip of ten degrees by stem or stern sends her down 180 fathoms in a minute.

"Never shifted 'em, sir!" protested Smith in a choking voice. "But, she dips. She dips, by Gawd, sir!"

As the wheel spoke these words Holdsworth threw himself back into the chamber. A hail from one of the torpedo ratings rang out behind him. But it was lost in the C.O.'s clamour.

"She can't fly, she can't fly," he mouthed furiously. "Pump her out."

Again the hail rang from forward, where the trimming-tank defect was opening up. But Tarrant and the seamen were struggling with the demented officer.

From away ahead there vibrated a great shock that threw the twisting, twining group off their feet. It was the end of the seventh in the enemy's line—hit underwater in her port after magazine by D 4's weapon. There followed another hammer-like stroke, yet her men were unaware of it.

Tarrant gave a last jerk to the knots binding fast the commanding officer.

Dazed a little, and out of wind, he jumped to his feet. Though the atmosphere was cool with the spray playing from the air flasks, sweat dripped off his features.

"Man hand-pumps," he ordered. "No flurry, lads, no flurry. . . . We'll get out on top all right."

Only for a second did mortal terror palsy his staunch heart. It was when his nostrils were stung by chlorine.

The gas, stifling and maddening in its effects on the human system, was now being thrown off on the acid of the electric accumulators coming in contact with the rising leakage.

A low moan escaped the second-in-command.

His eye devoured the clinometer and pressure gauges.

There rushed on Lieutenant Tarrant's comprehension something of the horrors perpetrated by the chlorine maddened. Wild prayers went up from his heart.

Away on land the devastation of war ravaged Edinburgh and Leith, and parts of Granton and Portobello.

Many of the streets were blocked by fallen buildings, and many were impassable owing to the fires raging on

either side. Princes Street, that rare and beautiful stretch of vistas, was, alack, the scene of awful chaos and conflagration, from the ruined Post Office and Register House to as far west as Castle Street.

Hidden behind murky smoke the High Street and Canongate were burning fiercely, and the billowing pall enveloped the Castle and its riven masonry and blazing barracks.

Yet the underwater defence had achieved its purpose.

The enemy—warned by the loss of two battleships and 1389 souls, together with many of the mine boats—was withdrawing at seventeen knots on a course N.N.E. The dull thud-thudding of the great guns ceased as suddenly as it had begun. It was as well, mayhap; for the underwater craft, four in number, that had been replenishing stores at Rosyth were now dropping seaward in hot haste to reinforce their consorts' attack.

D 6 beached herself near Granton, in a leaking condition through striking the wreck of one of the battleships. But not till late that afternoon was D 4 recovered.

She was drifting with the tide, the swell almost tumbling in through her conning-tower hatchway.

The face of the officer sitting on the edge of it was horribly lacerated, and streaked with dried blood. His uniform was as if it had been almost torn off his body.

In answer to the hail from the mother-ship that had been searching for vestiges of any of her units, he cried:

"Hello, there, hello! What ship? Can you send a boat across? I can't do anything with this craft! She's no good for flying. D——d awkward business trying to, I tell you! . . . The whole affair very unpleasant."

Below, where bloody and mutilated bodies lay at the foot of the ladder, and choked the hatch opening on the engine-room, Lieutenant Tarrant was discovered.

His face and hands were grumous with blood, his right

ear hung by a shred of skin. On seeing the face of rescue he sought to get upon his feet, but it was in vain.

“ Pump her out, pump her out,” he gasped in husky pants. “ We’ll save her yet, and Mr. Holdsworth as well, men. . . . For God’s sake, pump. . . . Maybe, she will fly.”

THE CASE OF LIEUTENANT BINYON

THE Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet looked searchingly at the haggard officer standing before him.

The expression in his steely-grey eyes was harsh and forbidding. But Binyon felt it more endurable than the covert glances of his fellow-officers. They, he knew well, were eying him askance as they stood in a cluster to port, down the flagship's fore bridge.

"D——n them," he raged inwardly, "they won't give a man a chance to retrieve himself."

The admiral, he knew, was just. Just as he was inflexible, like some supreme, inviolate being.

"Who is the more culpable? You in asking for the drug, or the staff surgeon in giving it? You sought relief from the pains in your head, and overlooked what might be demanded of you in your duties. . . . You ignored what was required—you!—a British officer!"

Men more dreaded Asycue's cold, even voice than any torrent of wrath and reprimand. It was the voice of a stern disciplinarian, who meted out no more than himself would have expected.

"It was the drug that flustered me, sir."

Binyon's voice was stifled. But his eye met the Great Officer's straight and full.

A circumstance the Commander-in-Chief gladly noted.

"Thank God, none of the men saw you last night, during the brief attack of their cruisers. . . . Your shyness under fire. . . . You, an officer I particularly requested to be appointed to my staff. It——"

But again the fore sighting-top urgently hailed the bridge. Anew Sir James Asycue, K.C.B., C.V.O., turned to examine the enemy.

In the clear light of that early forenoon, they were quickly growing fuller to the eye, across the waters of the Adriatic. Against the azure heavens the smoke from the Austrians' older battleships trailed down the languid wind. Pennants of destruction!

"Ten of 'em. The *Tegetthof* leading. . . . Their four new vessels there. . . . I see them," grunted the C.I.C. to his flag-lieutenant, who had approached him. "This is the fight for the Mediterranean, eh, Rodney?"

The Commander-in-Chief looked past the flagship's mainmast with its slatting halliards and wireless gear, past the spueing funnels, and down his battle-line. Intently his eyes bore upon its seven units.

A grimace fled over his face at some unrevealed thought. He ridged his brows.

His glance fell aside on the few officers now on the senior flagship's bridge; and the frown passed from the long, keen face with its deep arching brows and straight, broad nose. The next instant, when he regarded Lieutenant Binyon, authority, merciless all-demanding, inflexed the sunburnt features.

"Observation duties as before, Lieutenant Binyon. What is to be done about you, depends on yourself . . . you understand what I mean? Yes, Rodney . . . enemy altering formation. Yes, I see. No! We don't hang back for the Frenchmen. We strike home, now. . . . No negative result, pray God."

This was the fight for the command of the Inland Sea—and much more.

The future of Australia and New Zealand, of the suzerainty of India and the British Possessions in the East, was to be decided in European waters.

Grim and unfaltering the seven battleships were planning through the smooth water of the gulf, each

following its next ahead in the most exact and inflexible order.

The *Bulwark* was their Will and Destiny.

Lieutenant Binyon moved a few feet down the upper fore bridge, and cast a look at the enemy, then aloft at the hoist of flags that stood on the breeze like boards.

“Remember Lissa, 1811.”

The message thrilled Binyon even as it thrilled his comrades—the childrens’ childrens’ children of Trafalgar’s men.

Harvey and Collingwood—Troubridge and Palliser—Codrington and Pellew—Atcherly, Wemyss, Adair, and the others—they are not dead. Their keen brains and eyes, strong blood and indomitable will for England are there in conning-tower and barbette.

Not for a lifetime or two but for three centuries and more had Vice-Admiral Ayseue’s stock been the pick of the choice of the naval will of England.

Her Flag his forbears had carried to victory in that selfsame sea.

Ahead, the Austrian column had changed formation from single line ahead, and had separated into two divisions—the van, six units, standing four points to starboard at sixteen knots, and the rear, four units, six points to port at fourteen knots.

It was thus Admiral von Sterneck thought to envelope his weaker opponent and crush him, vessel and vessel.

As his divisions veered, the fore-turret guns of the leading vessels thundered out together, and consorts astern opened fire as their cannon bore on the British column.

The shells ruptured against the face of the *Bulwark’s* forward superstructure, and swept the boat-deck. In successive crashes her fore barbette opened fire. As its reports rapidly heightened into a continuous thud-thudding, the 6-inch casemate guns came into action, delivering an incredibly swift fire.

"To the conning-tower, Rodney," ordered the admiral. "Soon be very hot. . . ."

The Austrians' shells, bursting overhead and driving downwards and outwards with terrific force, were crumbling and rending everything not behind armour.

"We're into it, Binyon, we're into it," the flag-lieutenant shouted in a staccato voice as he scurried to gain the conning-tower. "Just hell in a few seconds! . . . Good luck to you, Jack!"

Despite Binyon's tension, the friendly words made his heart leap thankfully. There was, then, another who had not judged him too harshly.

The Commander-in-Chief he saw throw an intent glance astern as if gauging the rapidity and endurance of his line's firing. His lips were parted, and his breath came in short regular gasps. Yet, except for close-knitted brows and gleaming eyes, his face appeared impassive as ever.

Again the eyes of the two officers on the shuddering fore bridge fled to the enemy.

Was the British Mediterranean Fleet to be enveloped—annihilated?

Asycue was driving it at eighteen knots into the gap between the two Austrian divisions.

A gout of shell from the *Tegetthof* burst athwart the senior flagship's port bow, wrecking it together with the port anchor gear. Projectiles from the two Austrian Dreadnoughts in the division coming down to starboard battered against her fore barbette, shot away its port sighting hood, and drove a tornado of slivers across the bridge.

Sir James's forehead was grazed, and the epaulettes on his right shoulder wrenched off. But with his cap tipped over his eyes he gazed unmoved at the enemy.

"The conning-tower, sir? . . . the conning-tower?" cried Lieutenant Binyon.

A little wry smile of reluctance fled over the C.I.C.'s grey face. He nodded corroboration. But slowly he turned towards the fighting position, just as if showing his indifference to death.

"The wireless . . . instruction F. . . ."

Asycue's voice came broken and far-away in the tremendous hurly-burly of the guns.

Binyon dashed for the bridge ladder; but forward a huge jet of blinding pink fire flashed up. Even as Sir James flung himself into shelter between the conning-tower aperture and its shield, the appalling crash smote the ear of 12-inch shells exploding against the fore barbette and casemates.

The tremendous shock pitched Binyon off the ladder. As he fell, projectiles wrecked the bridge, and a tumble of debris pinned him to the deck.

When he recovered consciousness the engagement was still raging, like a horrible phantasmal convulsion of Nature against which nothing could stand. Yet the very din helped to draw his wits together.

The woodwork of the shattered bridge was smouldering, and the acrid smoke stifled him. Gushes of splinters, broken metal, and shell chips screamed past; a volume of smoke from the small fires drove down in a blast of bursting shell. Helplessness, acquiescence in his death, swept into the encraved officer, and, moaning, he closed his eyes, awaiting the end.

The following moment there came to him his ignominy of the previous night, together with recollection of his message. Training and discipline, reinforcing man's instinct to live, levered up his will-power, that had been weakened by the insidious drug, but more by the jangling of the brain it had soothed.

Wriggling desperately about he contrived to release himself.

As he gained his feet again, a bareheaded, gory-faced officer, heading some bluejackets trailing hoses behind

them, dashed forward to replace the fire squad that exploding shell had cut down piecemeal.

A projectile struck the damaged after funnel, and with a rumbling noise part of it tumbled athwart the boat-deck. The ear was stunned with the shrill of missiles and the crash and crunch of erupting shells. Around Binyon the deck was bloodstained—splashed with human pulp and dismembered bodies.

But he saw nothing except the enemy.

Confident of his crews' coolness under the fierce, searching fire to port and starboard from the enemy's *Dreadnought* and older battleships, the Vice-Admiral had thrust his line through the gap. He had turned the rear of the 2nd division, and, masked by its vessels, had completed its disorder by his grouped broadsides while passing along off their starboard to circle upon the van of the 1st division.

Admiral von Sterneck's 1st division was now holding parallel with the British line. With that awful cyclonic fire from straight-shooting gunners, which had blasted the Austrians' 2nd division now in disorder away astern, Asycue was forcing him to stand away to the southward.

The hulls of the British vessels were battered and broken, and their upper works masses of ragged, crumpled wreckage; but they were still maintaining formation.

Only the *Implacable*, that had fallen away to starboard, out of control, and with thin-armoured after parts punched open to the water-line, was delivering a desultory fire. In the furious cannonading of the 2nd division's two Dreadnoughts upon her, she was being literally crunched and blasted asunder.

"... You! . . . Binyon! . . . Heard you were dead," croaked the officer heading the fire squad. "Nothing wrong with you! Conning-tower took it, you were killed."

The contumely in Denison's cracked voice—visible, too, on his smutched features—scourged Binyon. He

had been lying inactive, while comrades were living and dying in this hour of Britain's need.

"Wreckage knocked me silly—pinned me down, too," he shot out, waving an arm towards the bridgework debris. "How long——"

But the repercussion of shell blowing out of the foot of the forward funnel, and the crash of the iron falling on both bridge and conning-tower overwhelmed his voice.

"The Admiral?" Binyon jerked out desperately, as he leaped aside to evade the tumbling wreckage. "My God, the Admiral?"

Fired by the red-hot metal of the smoke-stack the smouldering bridgeworks and superstructure were bursting into smoke and flame that wreathed around the conning-tower. The Senior Flagship, blinded and helpless, lounged to port, then to starboard, then to port again, pelted by the concentrated fire of the Austrians' van.

The fore parts of her were being rent open and blown away, and beyond the fore barquette were enveloped in the dust and murk of bursting shell. Around her the sea boiled, throwing up huge pillars of water where the missiles fell astray.

"Our line! . . . Look at 'em, sir," cried one of the signal staff, standing grim-faced and resolutely cool in shelter of the disabled upper casemate near the lieutenant. "By God, they're turning after her."

Binyon flashed a look astern.

Splinters lacerated his left elbow. Something numbed his right thigh, and it began to bleed heavily. But he was unaware.

Apprehensions of defeat—of annihilation of The Flag—took him like physical spasms.

The enemy's 1st division would cross the British T.

For the *Bulwark's* next astern, taking it that she was again under control, was turning in succession in her

wake—consorts following. And under the weight of metal from the Austrians' concentrated firing the units of the British Mediterranean Fleet would be smashed into sinking hulks.

Binyon shouted the message for the after conning tower to a signalman. Then he rushed towards the broken ladder, giving on the superstructure deck and upper fighting position.

Shells burst in huge discs of fire against the dented top of the fore barbette; and Lieutenant Denison, attempting to rescue the Flag Officers, fell backwards to the deck, a bleeding, ripped-up mass, two bluejackets in his rear collapsing into a groaning heap.

Again the gushes of crimson and yellow flame momentarily blinded the sight—again, the acrid scorching fumes and blast of splinters and steel chips screaming past.

But Binyon had swung himself up on the superstructure deck.

He tore aside the smoke-stack wreckage jammed between the conning-tower shield and opening. The jagged metal seared and flayed his hands and arms, and tore the skin from his face in shreds and patches. Choked with smoke and singed by flames—gasping and almost blinded—he forced his way inside the fighting position.

So murky was the cramped interior he at first hardly saw the bodies there.

Beside the wheel he found two dead—the chief quartermaster and Rodney—the flag-lieutenant still gripping it. Between them and the defaced figures lying alongside the destroyed range-finder was the Commander-in-Chief.

Sir James was lying face-down—huddled, and insensible—his grey hair clotted with blood from a scalp wound. The left shoulder of his uniform had been split open by a sliver of steel, just grazing the skin.

Sight of the familiar face, smeared with blood and battle grime, pierced Binyon in a dagger-thrust of agony.

Gripping the Flag Officer under the shoulders, he dragged him over the bodies. Projectiles struck the tower with stunning impact. The great ship staggered under the blows lodged home.

Desperately Lieutenant Binyon stumbled outside, trailing the Commander-in-Chief in his arms.

Only with difficulty he managed to keep his footing. On a shell fizzing out near by he lost his balance and fell, drawing the officer with him.

But eager arms succoured them from below.

Already in the south-west the hard-hitting guns of France's vessels were opening out in quick thudding peals upon von Sterneek as he stood to rake the British van. Rearward, Asycue's junior Flag Officer, realizing the straits, was signalling the line to turn altogether, with the intention of drawing across the Austrians' rear.

In time the enveloping tactics of the Allies were effectively achieved. . . .

"Gunnery, gunnery. Always gunnery." It crushed superior force, but at a terrible cost.

"We have given the Austrians the coup de grâce," remarked the Commander-in-Chief to Lieutenant Binyon some hours later when, despite his condition, Asycue was endorsing the first detailed despatch for wireless transmission to Gibraltar for London. "Not much gained, meantime, by the enemy, though we haven't had news how matters stand in the Baltic waters. . . . The Germans in force there."

He looked up under his bandaged brows at the tired and wounded officer who was standing at his side.

"I thank God it was you, Lieutenant Binyon, who saved my life. You have acquitted yourself with distinguished bravery under an exceedingly hot and sustained fire. But . . . remember . . . we of the Navy have to guard against ourselves—incessantly guard against ourselves. . . . You know. . . . Our acts and thoughts. For as

we die for England when she calls, so must we live. . . .
Every man of us. . . .”

A lump rose in the lieutenant's throat as the Great Officer's hand found his in sincerity and strength.

Around, beneath, and on the decks overhead lay the testimony of England's Dead.

UNTO THIS LAST

WHEN the midshipman came to his senses he found himself lying in the sternsheets of the cutter, that was heaving sluggishly, the bilgewater swilling about the dead huddled across and under the thwarts.

Where had raged all the hurly-burly of the engagement was now the menace of wind and snow.

He tried to rise, but sank with a deep groan.

Up his side a flame of pain had seethed, catching on his heart; and for a few moments he could not breathe. Then he felt a warmth, as of lukewarm tea, spread beneath his under-vest, his movements having broken open the wound. The water surging over his limbs became tinged.

Involuntarily he made an effort to seat himself on the sternsheets. This time, torture darkened consciousness, and he fainted. Rolling and dipping, the half-swamped boat drifted onward in the seaward current of the West Ems.

A tip of water falling over in the port quarter smacked his face, deluging his eyes and open mouth; it was this that revived him. And for a little he lay staring confusedly at the bodies; then, of a sudden, in a gasping, strangled voice he began to call upon his crew.

"Bradley? . . . Nichols? . . . Brock? . . . Dyson? . . ."

But his strength failed, and he remained silent, breathing deep and gustily, his eyes dilated in agony. To every motion of the cutter his lacerated sinew and flesh seemed to tear and crush and fold in flaps of jerking torture.

In time, however, he became aware that life was among the seamen sprawled amidships. The corpses were

heaved apart. An arm was thrust out ; then the head and shoulders of his coxswain appeared.

Bradley lay motionless for a minute, his eyes fixed on the splintered gunwale opposite them. Of a sudden, he clutched the near thwart with both hands, and with a great effort pulled himself free of the encumbering dead.

Grunting in his pain he got upon his knees and looked round, and, seeing his officer, dragged himself aft.

"Where are ye hit, sir ? Have we smashed 'em ? Have we smashed 'em ?"

The midshipman replied in slow, husky gasps :

"Enemy stood out, engaging, sou'-west. . . . Any more . . . alive ?"

The coxswain shook his head.

"Only you and me, sir. Right leg knocked a bit above the knee, and feeling mortal bad I am, sir. . . . Some of ours sure to chase them home."

"Look out . . . look out . . . for ours. Bradley, you——" But the black gulf of agony sucked in the lad's consciousness.

When he recovered himself it came to him that the coxswain had covered him with his clothes and oil-skins. He felt much easier, but numbed with the cold. Yet amidships, Bradley was sitting stripped to his trousers and grey underflannel.

With painful effort he was trying to bail out the boat, stopping now and again to take a long look over the swells that were now being hidden in mid-distance by gathering fog.

Hearing the midshipman make moan he turned and said :

"Sorry, sir, these things o' mine are that soppin' wet, but, with them, an' lyin' in shelter, maybe ye're feelin' warmer ? Have we smashed 'em ? Oh, this——"

But on the cutter heaving, and he collapsing as if his spine were broken, his head had struck the near thwart. And exhausted by the loss of blood, the fatigue, and

exposure, he lay moaning on the gratings, his broken limb twisted under him, and outstretched arm squashing a hideously distorted face.

The midshipman did not move. His teeth were clenched and eyes nigh shut, their lashes dark upon the deathly white of his brine-bleached cheeks.

It was the abrupt blaze of his very minor part in the action of the past night that illumed once more his oblivion.

Indistinct reports of exploding mines as the desperate foe, now reinforced by additional submarines, picked their passage out of the Borkum Blockade, the rockets of the British pickets intimating the enemy was issuing in force answered by the fireballs thrown up by the Flagship away seaward; the bent backs of the cutter's men pulling desperately to gain their vessel, her burst of firing on an underwater craft, whose mushroom-like gout of spray told of her end; the shrill, continuous cracking of quick-firers as the hostile destroyers made their splendid dash: all these flashes of incident had become obscured to the lad by the deadly spurt of crimson from a near torpedo craft as, tearing onward to mighty prey, she had smitten the cutter with a drooping fire.

But now, down an eddy of the rising wind, rang the thudding of heavy guns, their rat-tatting salvos deepening into a long roll of thunder which aroused the officer.

He tried to get up, but his cramped and stiffening thews refused their offices. Yet the coxswain succeeded in raising himself on his unwounded knee, and holding fast to a rollock strained his eyes in the direction of the nearing engagement.

Then as the midshipman, succumbing to the cold slipped into a vague dark dream he was dimly aware of the coxswain flinging himself to starboard, for there the seaman's vision had beheld two cruisers racing past in line ahead.

Bradley narrowed his strained eyes, but, baffled by the

drift, could not pick out any details. Yet on the rear unit speaking out fast and furiously again with her after piece, the sharp, discordant squeal told enough to his trained ear.

The man threw his arms into the air in a delirium of joy. On the officer's muffled hearing rang the shout :

“ Whipped ! By G—d, we've whipped 'em ! ”

It was about the darkening when the youngster came back to life. He felt something was pressing heavily, enveloping him close.

It was the coxswain, who in a last rally had stretched himself upon his officer, thinking to keep him alive with the heat of his body. His now livid face was resting cheek-down on the left shoulder of the midshipman.

It seemed to Annesley the seas had gone down. A calm held in the air, and snow was falling. He found himself too weak to roll the coxswain aside ; and as to whether he was dead or no was in doubt.

The fine snow had delicately powdered Bradley's coarse features and short brown hair, and here and there flecked his bushy eyebrows.

Only the soft s-s-urring of the snow was in the air.

Falling perpendicularly, it had covered the thwarts and sternsheets and thickened along the gunwales. Under a cerecloth, without spot or smear of rusty red, had it hidden the dead, except where a body jutted out above another, or where the bilgewater lapped about them to the grave motions of the cutter.

The midshipman was parched with thirst, and greedily licked the flakes settling on his lips and chin. He strove to turn his head and was unable ; his arms were clipped inextricably. Groaning in his helplessness he gazed upward, but, the snow blinding him, was fain to close his eyes.

Then recollections of the attack again thronged on his sinking faculties, to change to his merry cadetship days,

and the too few holidays with his guardian. Yet no fears, nor anguish of death approached.

To England's dying son the frost was merciful as the sea.

Darkness fell, and with it the wind veered into the north. In great eddies and long-drawn, mournful flurries it drove the snow in clouds before it. Over the gunwale of the small craft it gushed ; and the snow piled deeper upon the thwarts and gratings, graciously swathing the marbling faces of the midshipman and his dead.

THE SIRE LIVES IN HIS SONS

THE leading pursuer spoke out again. But this time her projectile burst short of the British cruiser.

Captain Torrens stared at the enemy stringing out over the grey-blue reaches of West Atlantic astern of the *Quebec*. Then frowning to himself he rested the binoculars on the bridge-rail and let his eyes rove fore and aft along his upper and superstructure decks.

When they settled on the starboard end of her after-bridge, which the *Friedrich Hart's* previous shell had wrecked on bursting low over the after deck—tearing open the quarters of the men berthed aft, as now obtaining in all large vessels of war—a muttered curse escaped him. He gave a heave of his broad shoulders.

Yes! The Canadian cruiser had had a very narrow escape.

"We're dropping the enemy very smartly, Mr. Giddens. The after barbette's shell must have burst between the enemy's fore-barbette gunports. The drive of splinters'd put both gun-crews out of action."

"She'll throw all of them off, sir!" asserted Lieutenant Giddens in a confident voice. "Four, though, still holding on. The *Deutschers'* two squadrons must have joined up again after trace of them was lost away north."

"Yes. . . . Joined up again. . . . The commander to report damages aft, immediately. He's devilish slow!"

Throwing another glance at the Germans, the commanding officer stepped up his broad bridge, to scrutinize the speed tell-tales.

The navigating lieutenant passed the order and on

recrossing the bridge to port exchanged a few words with the officer of the watch.

"Beastly, this, eh, having to take to our heels? . . . 'Number One' in hot water as ever. . . . Damned shame!"

"Yes, damned shame!—all of this," came Lieutenant Rocke's undertone growl, as he clapped the binoculars to his eyes and gazed searchingly astern. "One might think the 'Owner' has a spite against the commander, just 'cause he is his cousin. With these new Ontario mines behind him. A pot of money! . . . The Germans are a bit too heavy for us; but, we might have had a little game of long bowls before pelting away. She has the speed of them, and more."

"They'd have smashed us. *Quebec's* very small chop even to these four after us, you fire-eater. Soon be helping Admiral Jardine to wipe them all off the seas," rejoined Giddens. "Here comes 'Number One.' Lower deck aft, a sickening sight, so the surgeon says. Number Ten mess simply ripped into chunks—not a man left alive."

As the British scout stood down into the south-south-west, 800 miles north-by-west of Cape Ortegal, her turbines still took her onward invincibly, as if steam and steel were everlasting. This armoured cruiser still held her own as one of the fastest units in the British Empire's Fleet.

The officers on her fore bridge turned their eyes from the pursuers to look at Captain Torrens and his chief executive officer, who were standing opposite the tell-tale on the starboard funnel-casing.

Tall and swart, his keen face even graver than ever, Commander Elliot seemed to predominate his superior officer.

Yet there was that about Torrens' thick neck, his short, braced figure, and blunt face, that spoke of imperious authority as quick in its decision as in its action.

"Thanks," came in his incisive voice, on the commander ending his report. "Call away a working party to clear up the wreckage and help adjust repairs. Armourers' crew to make good the damage to fittings as far as is practicable. . . . Eh, what you say? You have had 'first-aids' piped, to assist the sick-bay? Nonsense!"

"I have called away first-aids in accordance with the Regulation, sir, on that point," the commander replied, in a repressed voice. "The wounded are in great suffering."

"Not the wounded but the Ship to be thought of," rasped the commanding officer in trouncing tones as he moved away a step or two up his gently swaying bridge. "This is no peace manœuvres, Mr. Elliot! The men are still standing by at general quarters. Are we not still in action? The wounded must lie where they fall, till we come out of it. First-aids are required to fight the ship." With a sudden flush firing the tan of his sunburnt face, the commander saluted, and made for the bridge ladder. His eyes were set before him, his lips compressed.

"By thunders! by thunders!" Lieutenant Giddens commented in undertone to the officer of the watch, as promptly he made to turn to the station-pointer to fix anew the enemy's position, "what a dressing down, eh? The 'Old School!' . . . A few more as harsh as him, and there would be something uncommonly like trouble in a quiet way."

"'First-aids to wounded,'" Torrens grunted to himself, "and the Ship at general quarters with these Germans yet astern! Seems to me, they ought to wrap 'em all up in cotton-wool, and fight with pea-shooters and pop-guns!"

On his eye alighting on the commander, who was now gaining the deck, a gleam of something more than impersonal feeling fired their depths of steel-blue. With a contortion of his brows as if repelling memories—froward thoughts—he again scrutinized the enemy.

They stood out upon the desolate waters as oblongs in slate-grey against a distant ground of leaden-grey, their deck details merged into the general outline through distance and the haze. To non-expert eyes, the huge vessels suggested something of the appalling forces contained within them; forces so instant with the horrors and destruction of war.

To Captain Torrens, they but indicated strength too excessive for him to engage, or even trifle with.

Confident of the *Quebec's* mighty steam heart, he turned round, and planting his sturdy body against the rail took another look round and below him.

That great forecastle with its massive barbette and twin guns leering high above the bow-ridge of spray and water sheering from the stem—this bridge stripped of its wood-work, and lying gaunt beneath his feet—the towering mainmast and the drab funnels gushing forth interminable coils of light tawny smoke—not this time were they to be twisted and pulverized beneath the thunderbolts of superior armaments, superior protection, too.

Not this time, then, were the enemy's leviathans to crush the cruiser into a sinking wreck.

Immediately they were hull-down, she was to stand about, and again endeavour to open up communications between the Atlantic and North Sea Fleets. Far over leagues of black sea her consorts were likewise skinning their eyeballs.

Then, of a sudden and in a dastard fashion, Destiny dealt her blow.

On board the British cruiser a muffled roar rang out below decks. A great head of steam seethed up amidships, to expand swiftly into a cloud, obscuring the spar deck and blotting out the after bridge. Slackening abruptly, the *Quebec* swerved from her course, but instantly was held up to it again by the wheel and quartermaster.

Captain Torrens sprang towards the engine-room

telephone. The midshipman posted at it stepped aside, handing him the receiver.

"‘Starboard’s main steam-pipe burst.’ . . . Close stokehold stop-valves. Open out all fans. Yes! Pipe for volunteers to rescue casualties. . . .’"

The commanding officer’s eye fled astern.

Cool and controlled though his voice remained, an expression, evasive, undecipherable, came and went over his face.

With a shrug of his shoulders he wheeled towards his officers.

"She’ll slug along at eleven knots, gentlemen," said he laconically. "It is a fight after all. We may congratulate ourselves on that certainty—one after our heart, too!"

So it was as the rescue party, roughly swathed in sacks against the scalding steam in the starboard compartment of the engine-room, removed the blinded and boiled victims, that the *Quebec’s* bugle soared short and sharp. In her casemates, and deep beneath in the magazines and suffocatingly hot ammunition passages, her men leapt again to carrier-cage and hoist. Officers of divisions hurried to their posts.

To the officers on her lower fore bridge—grouped behind their captain as if winning confidence from that stolid figure—the hostile warships now appeared to come up with almost incredible swiftness.

Torrens was examining them searchingly, his eyes narrowed behind the binoculars, and mouth down-drawn, the curve of the upper-lip graven deep between steep cheek and chin.

Breathing low, he put down the glasses and regarded his officers. Longer than on the others did his glance rest on the commander.

Grave though Elliot was as ever, his face had a cast of animation, of stern joy.

It came to Captain Torrens that at any rate his cousin was no coward, even if he had shown him baser qualities.

Yet he grudged allowing him this small praise, so deep rankled the old wound yet.

"Well, gentlemen," said he very slowly, "the enemy are coming up hand-over-hand. We have a chance of doing some damage to them. But, if they are wise enough to concentrate their fire, we'll be smashed apart in a few minutes. . . . Not heavy enough to stand up to them at all! . . . Meantime, wireless cabin to continue calling up."

"They're opening fire," remarked the commander eagerly, as two sparks of almost invisible flame broke from the forecastle of the leading unit of the four cruiser-battleships.

The next second, the shock and jar of bursting shells again smote the ear.

One of them narrowly missed the *Quebec's* starboard quarter, and exploded low upon the water, throwing up a dense cloud of spray. But the other burst over her, shattering the after-bridge and part of the top of her port funnel.

Captain Torrens rasped out an order.

Forthwith his after barbette commenced crashing out in reply, solemnly—with appalling deliberation.

Smothering an exclamation, the commanding officer jumped to the edge of the lower bridge and scrutinized the gun-crew, close under his eye, sheltered by the forward upper starboard casemate.

The faces of the trained men were tense, one or two almost wooden. Year-long discipline sustained them in its iron grip. But on the features of the reservists, standing alert and steady, there was that which caused the Head of the ship to ridge his forehead.

"By God, they'll have to hammer into it," Captain Torrens grunted to himself. "They'll have to!"

The next instant a projectile from the enemy, rapidly closing the ranges, burst low, twisting and destroying part of the spar deck. And the stubborn expression

deepened on his face. A brick-red flush suffused it from brows to throat.

Some minutes later, another exploded above her amidships, rending a jagged chasm in the starboard funnel.

Out of it drove a great tongue of smoky flame.

But as yet the after barbette had done no visible damage. Though its shells were bursting in little balls of filmy smoke on the fore parts of the leading enemy, the *Ersatz Brandenburg*.

Inside its elliptical 8½-inch steel gun-house, the officer in charge, grim-mouthed and stern, and his two sweaty-faced, half-naked gun-crews.

To fresh instructions from the sighting-top on the mainmast, his 9·2-inch quickfirers thundered out anew. This time the shells were pitched between the leading enemy's fore-barbette gun-ports.

Again the 12-inch guns were temporarily silenced.

"Good! Very good!" Captain Torrens jerked out, marking the hits with difficulty owing to the greyness in the atmosphere. "Mr. Bruce is putting in real work at last. When the four of them open out with all guns bearing, we'll get a pounding, gentlemen. . . . Almost time we're inside the fighting position. . . ."

Even as he spoke the four cruiser-battleships stood six points to port, drawing across the stern of the distant chase.

One after the other the now encircling line ahead opened a broadside cannonade.

Blasts of splinter and shell fragments swept the *Quebec's* after and amidships parts, and caught the fore bridge to port, demolishing the corner of the chart-house.

Again the German gunners sent home their projectiles, pitching them with nice accuracy. The air was filled with white-hot steel dust and slivers.

"The conning-tower, sir," shouted Lieutenant Giddens, "the conning-tower."

"No," volleyed his commanding officer, "no! Not yet! Can't see enough there. . . . A minute or two yet. . . ."

The projectiles took the Britisher like a tornado, bespattering casemates and barbettes with steel chips, rending gaps in her thin side armour, and twisting and breaking the girderwork of the boat-deck. The great warship quivered like a live thing in agony.

By now all her casemate guns bearing to port had opened out with sullen mouthing.

A tangle of wreckage from the upper bridge fell on to the lower one, and burst into flame. Through a rent in the deck near by, broken metal, splinters, and the reek of small fires on the deck beneath gouted up as if through a nozzle.

With an inarticulate cry—a motion of his arm towards the conning-tower—Captain Torrens bade his staff gain its shelter.

As the commander passed to its opening, the sight of him amidst the chaos of death caused a malign thought in Torrens that almost slew his better self.

He checked it. Yet it was to prompt him, evilly.

Through the narrow sight-slits of the upper fighting-position the commanding officer stared at the enemy. Forward a huge splash of white and purple flame flashed in the air, and blinded him for a second or two. The crash of the exploding shells made his senses reel.

The *Quebec's* bows were crumpled by the stream of 12-inch projectiles. Her port funnel wrecked at the base fell athwart the fore-bridges, and their shattered wood-work here and there took fire.

"Putting on speed to cross our bows," Commander Elliot roared into Torrens' ear.

"Yes . . . crossing our bows. . . . Sixteen points, starboard helm."

The commanding officer's eyes devoured the enemy.

They showed little material damage save in their van,

the *Ersatz Brandenburg*, that had her starboard bow torn open. And the jagged aperture was speedily being enlarged by keen-eyed British gunners

Again the heavens erupted destruction; and the cruiser's forecastle was enveloped in dazzling fire. There came the stupendous crash of 12-inch projectiles hitting the base of the fore barbette, the hurricane of steel fragments blasting away the face of the superstructure.

With a shrill, ear-splitting clatter, they beat in under the mushroom top of the conning-tower.

The quartermaster at the wheel, together with the midshipman at the telegraphs, was flayed open and struck down. Under the tremendous strokes the thick steel wall vibrated excruciatingly.

As the hostile battle-line with their superior speed drew across the cruiser's bows, their weight of fire sent her reeling.

Her masts and gunnery top were shot away. Between the port forward and amidships casemates the plating was hammered asunder, down to her armoured deck. She was broken open aft as if in a volcanic eruption; and the barbette there disabled; its two guns out of action, and interior a horrible shambles.

Could frail flesh and blood withstand the devastation?

Within the stifling conning tower, that was starred and dented but yet intact, Captain Torrens dashed the sweat out of his eyes. Blotched and bleeding his face was with flesh wounds from splinter and metal chips. But on it was cast indomitable resolution.

Lieutenant Giddens' voice pealed in his ear:

"Casemates' firing falling off. . . . Enemy . . . torpedo. . . ."

"No! not to be torpedoed. Force us to surrender," replied his commanding officer. "Not while I live . . . or any of you. . . ."

Through the haze and the battle reek the enemy were to be seen steaming in a half-arc off the bows.

They were keeping station at close intervals, and now appeared much damaged in their upperworks, and thin-armoured ends. The *Ersatz Wörth*, second from the rear, was on fire forward, and her consort's trestle-masts and unprotected deck works wrecked and shot away.

A fleck of flame from bursting 9.2-inch shells gleamed out against the drab of the *Ersatz Weissenburg's* upper fore barbette, and its guns ceased firing. But this success did not come home to Captain Torrens.

He had shot a glance amidships.

At the scenes there his breath came huskily as if the hot air stinking with explosive and half-consumed gases choked him. A cry of anguish escaped his cracked lips.

These upperworks, hashed and battered out of all shape . . . the demolished funnels, vomiting smoke and fiery cinders and sheets of flame . . . the gaping upper deck with its burning debris, which decimated fire squads were gallantly tackling . . . the adjacent casemate literally punched open, its inside hideous with dead and dying. . . . Only the fore barbette and two after guns in action, firing spasmodically as if strength was waning. . . .

In mental agony he gnawed his nether-lip.

Steel slivers screamed into the fighting position. Lieutenant Giddens was killed at the wheel, and the instruments wrecked.

"I'll fight her in shelter of for'ard casemate," Torrens cried into his commander's ear. "A death-trap . . . this. . . ."

Elliot made to pull up the hatch in the floor, giving into the armoured tube leading down into the lower fighting position and deck.

Torrens' voice swelled with years of suppressed hatred.

"Not that way. . . . Afraid of the open, eh? . . ."

With a sudden straightening of his back, his cousin saluted, and leaped toward the aperture opening on the

lower bridge. And as he passed out, a piece of jagged shell-metal rebounding from the shield protecting the aperture pierced his side. With a guttural moan the commander slid to the deck. He struggled to gain his feet, but in vain.

The drawn expression on Captain Torrens' face relaxed for an instant.

Hatred, and never a thought of his own fate, possessed his brain. . . . Not again was Elliot to see that colossal mining centre in New Ontario, which he had so cunningly filched from him.

"Let him lie, let him lie," he stormed at two of the signal staff, who, bending low, had scurried out of shelter by the port upper casemate, and up on to the lower bridge beside the commander. "Pass orders to the lower fighting position. Torpedo——"

Just then a terrific concussion smote the air. Commanding officer and men lost their balance at the sudden impact, and tumbled to the deck.

When Torrens came to his senses, he found himself lying by the casemate.

A warrant officer, his neck and chin swathed in blood-stained bandages, was bending over him. A foot or two away, through an irregular hole in the wrecked casemate there showed the dismounted quickfirer. Athwart and under it the bodies of its crew were squashed together, a hideous rusty puddle oozing out around them. In front of him was a group of men and petty officers, several of them heavily bandaged, and all more or less wounded, their naked arms and upper bodies seamed and red with viscid splinter-wounds.

They all were staring ahead, past a bareheaded officer standing in the partly blocked gangway, between the casemate and superstructure.

The *Quebec*, he noted, was still steaming, but slowly and with hardly steerage way on her. The air was strangely calm. In a horrible mumble rang the sufferings

of the wounded and dying—broken gasps and moans, imprecations, prayers, for help—for death too.

"The enemy?" gasped the captain, staggering to his feet, assisted by the warrant officer. "Who ordered 'Cease firing'?"

"We're knocked out, sir. . . . Only number four starboard left in action. . . . Fore barbette, too, but choked with bodies—starboard hoist jammed."

"Bin asked to surrender," boomed a husky voice out of the group. ". . . Surrender . . . US. . . ."

Fate could embody no fears to these Britons.

Captain Torrens touched the surviving junior executive officer on the shoulder.

Lieutenant Rocke was black and burning-eyed. His uniform hung in tatters about him, burnt and singed in his fight with the fires.

"Their squadron has come up, sir," he said in answer to the captain's question. "*Ersatz Brandenburg* and consorts ceased firing as they stood away for them. I have refused to surrender. . . . We are sinking fast. . . ."

"We sink with the ship," Torrens replied in a hoarse voice as if subjugating himself. "No surrender. . . . Just as before."

'Just as before.'

The Sire lives in his sons.

As the hapless commanding officer looked at the Imperial 2nd High Seas Squadron coming up on his port bow, its 2nd Division now in station in its rear, something of the old stolidity came back to his face.

The birthright of his blood and race stayed his torn heart.

"Commander Elliot wants to speak with you, sir," said a haggard 'first-aid,' saluting—a look in his eyes as if he had seen behind the gates of hell. "He is failing very fast—bleeding to death."

"Harry? . . . Harry? . . ."

The voice of the dying irresistibly thrilled Torrens.

Once in the far bygone they two had been as brothers, close and leal.

He flung himself on his knees beside him.

"How you hate me. . . . The mines . . . Uncle Jim . . . only . . . after you refused him to. . . . I willed you them, years ago. . . . And damn you . . . hate. . . ."

Even as the Last Recorder's, so did the commander's gasping voice penetrate Torrens' heart. He stared aghast at him.

"Look out . . . below . . . below . . ." came a blue-jacket's shout. "Bridge wreckage."

Others also voiced the danger too late.

With a ponderous crash the tangle of debris and girderwork toppled down. It crushed the little group below into shapeless masses. . . .

Closer abeam swung the hostile battle-line.

Grim and weather-beaten the huge gaunt ship leading the column veered apart to rake the cruiser with her ten 12-inch guns.

Her bugle soared out.

Slowly she dipped the Black-White-and-Red.

On her upper bridge the famous Imperial Officer and his staff bared their heads to England's Sons.

And thus gravely did each unit, on reaching her turning station. Ship after ship filed onward saluting the Brave.

Amazed, perplexed, the sinking *Quebec* watched their obeisance.

FLIGHT OF THE WAR-BIRDS

“ WELL ? ”

“ Still jammed.”

“ Confoundedly awkward ! ”

Lieutenant Perwynne made a wry mouth and continued to contemplate the wireless cabin's slip. He did not speak again. The sub-lieutenant, who had brought him the unwelcome news, began to make the best of it.

“ Of course, it is an annoyance to Whitehall ; but——”

“ Just so. It is an annoyance,” Perwynne interjected dryly, bending a little closer lest the whistling wind carried away his words. “ It cuts both ways.”

Deland chuckled grimly.

“ It serves us better than them, at any rate, sir. East'ard there'll be a chance of doing something 'stead of hanging on to the Admiralty's wires for the moves.”

“ Well, yes. But at home they won't know soon enough, if—if——”

Lieutenant Perwynne ceased. The two haggard-faced officers looked at each other. Their tired eyes were charged with a meaning which but five weeks ago would have been derided exceedingly.

“ This jamming, if it is atmospheric, can't hold much longer,” said the sub-lieutenant cheerfully. “ We'll soon know with all this play of fire around.”

“ There is something else. Don't you forget,” snapped his superior officer.

The greyness in the air that had hung confusingly along the horizon when first the destroyer, like many others that afternoon, had been ordered to extend her scouting area consequent on the breakdown in the wireless com-

munications, was now resolving into murky vapour veiling the farther reaches at sea. As with eyes narrowed against the current of air pouring across the bridge, Deland searched the ever-shifting curtain that merged indistinguishably into the banks of lurid cloud stretching the whole length of the north and east horizons, a feeling of desperation took him. But it was only for the moment. Firmly he put from him all thought of home and of those dear to him.

England was suffering slow anguish.

Far astern, the coasts of the Mother of Nations, She—the Mistress of the Seas—were now protected by but submarines and destroyers, two-fifths of which, after the weeks of incessant rip-and-range, night and day, were as halt and broken-winded as the heavy vessels stiffening the flotillas were death-traps in the obsolescence of their strength.

Out of the corner of his eye the commanding officer glimpsed the forward lookout suddenly peer into the south-east.

“What d’ye see, Collard?”

The seaman knuckled a leash of brine out of his eyes. Again he strained his tired sight, and shooting out his left arm pointed to a speck low down the vague demarcation of sky and water. Deland also switched his glasses on it. But the minute blur was gone already.

“A sea bird, sir,” roared the lookout against the wind.

“A sea bird,” echoed Perwynne, taking the binoculars from his eyes. But he glanced at Deland as if for corroboration.

“The haze mucks up everything!” said the sub-lieutenant doubtfully. “Sooner thunder clears the air the better for us.”

“Something in God’s skies that My Lords didn’t allow for,” he muttered to himself, dodging a gout of spray spurting over the forecastle and weather-screen. “But it’s some folks’ cocksureness that has brought us to this.”

The course of the war had depleted the battle squadrons of Britain as well as those of her adversaries.

On both sides every nerve was being strained to repair disabled vessels and complete those launched. Many British men-of-war detailed at the outbreak for commerce protection had been recalled for reinforcement of the squadrons now striving to hold the North Sea and of that in command of the Mediterranean.

That which is more poignant than all the horrors and sufferings of invasion was now tearing at England's heart.

Of a sudden Deland touched his C.O. on the left arm, for the thud of a gun, jerky, emphatic, even in its faroffness, rapped through shrouding murk and falling breeze. Almost immediately it was followed by an outburst of firing, irregular, yet fierce and sustained.

"We'll run slap into it, glory be!" the lieutenant jerked out, his grey face stiffening. "By G——d, what a flash!"

In dazzling gleam forked lightning had stabbed the sickly red heavens from north to east. An abrupt, rattling peal shattered the sounds of the guns. Then in the succeeding silence the reports mounted again, fiercer but more puzzling.

"Vessels makin' nor'-nor'-east," cried Deland. "More than likely we'll settle what is really interfering with the wireless."

Perwynne, without taking the binoculars off the distance ahead, nodded in reply.

There was that in the scattered cannonading which gave grounds for ominous surmise.

As, at forty miles an hour, the oil-driven war craft raced down on the engagement the spray hurled white and solid from her bows sheeted to leeward over forecastle and bridge-works, the particles stinging the skin like buck-shot and penetrating all clothing. The sub-lieutenant turned to leeward to wipe the salt off his face and cast a look over the deck where the bluejackets had been piped

to their posts. He noted that the wind had dropped to a dead calm, and out of the centre of the cloud-banks travelling westward from north and east, their foremost phalanx almost overhead, steely blue fires were flickering and flashing to the crash and rumble of thunder booming along the desolate waters like the sound of approaching cataclysm.

"More than us having a hand in this!" he grunted under his breath.

A feeling had come to him of the uncontrollable elemental force sweeping down to fall on them all, just like a vial of wrath on a blind man's helplessness.

From Lieutenant Perwynne burst an exclamation of exasperation and incredulity. His voice rang harsh, his words like expletives.

"Aeroplane!—no sea-bird."

"Aeroplane," confirmed the sub-lieutenant, binoculars glued on the speck that had reappeared from out the murk ahead.

At an almost inconceivable velocity it was now heading for the scout.

"The explanation at last of the unaccountable finds in Essex and elsewhere of petrol and bombs," Perwynne rapped out fiercely, scrutinizing the devil machine. "The move is very plain."

"They are striking before our reinforcements get away to sea," reflected Deland, catching his breath as with a strange sensation at heart he watched the war-bird grow into the outlines of a monoplane.

Thoughts flashed into him of the home aeronautic force depleted to reinforce the Expeditionary Forces—of Sheerness and other main bases now to be wrecked and totally devastated. Thoughts, too, of London in flames and horror, and of the country panic-stricken. With terror ravening on their vitals, would the multitude clamour for the cessation of hostilities—and at what price?

It was to hasten the work being effected by hard times and nervous throes, the raid by air had been launched.

"A Taube, sure enough," said Perwynne harshly. "This confounded calm helps 'em. Hope to G——d a thunderbolt shrivels 'em all up."

That instant a streak of flame ripped athwart the sky ahead, illuming in a horrid glare the ash-coloured waters. In the distant rolling that followed, the strident hum of the nearing enemy was lost to the ear.

The next second the shrill scream of the monoplane's propeller cut the air—a furious cackling arose from the destroyer's bow piece.

Tilting steep, the air-craft shot higher to evade the shell bursting around then under her. She swerved like a bird to port and starboard, escaping the wing fire. Then with engines throttled she swooped down, just above the vessel's amidships, and wholly out of the quickfirers' trajectories; for gun-mountings including vertical firing had not yet been fitted on board the older vessels.

Even to the British rifles cracking out, upturned eyes saw the aviator, who sat in a cradle abaft the lifting planes, drop a missile; the devil machine obliquely cleaving upward as he did so.

The Kreutzer projectile missed the port quarter by six feet, and the impact of its explosion jolted the destroyer severely. Another shell almost simultaneously tearing up the depths a few feet away, the combined geyser of spray and water fell like a waterspout across her deck, and men were almost carried off their feet.

"She's hit! she's hit!" Deland shouted, blinking his eyes on a tortuous shaft of lightning searing the vision.

"She's tumbling!" crowed the lieutenant. "Her——" But the terrible crashing and ricochetting peals convulsing the heavens overwhelmed his voice.

His whistle shrilled the 'Cease Fire.' In maniacal joy he motioned to the grey-winged air machine, that was

hurtling down tractors first as if her motors had been disabled. When she was within 200 feet of the surface of the water her occupant fell out of the skiff-like structure, some way back from the engines and behind the main planes. With arms and legs outspread as if in vain resistance, the unfortunate aviator whirled down, and disappeared in the scatter of spray on the air craft hitting the water.

Just then an excited voice hailed the bridge.

"Running into the thick of 'em," boomed the C.O. "A hold up. How many tackling 'em?"

"*London* and *Britannia*," trumpeted the signalman, without taking the glass from his eye. "Cruiser seems to be standing by the flagship, sir."

"She's hit, hit for'a'd," burst out Deland, a thumbnail blob of flame jetting forth on the nearer vessel's fore deck, to be succeeded by a mushroom-like puff of lightish vapour.

"Yes. *London* almost done for. Seems to be on fire, too—same as *Britannia*—somewhere aft. Cruiser trying to draw the attack."

A zigzag of lightning fretted the eastern horizon in a brilliant greenish flash, sharply outlining the sea-line; and, as a solemn, hollow, distant peal reverberated, a spitter of rain fell. There was not a breath of wind, and the whack-whacking and spits of flame from the warships came greatening over the darkening sea.

Astern, crimson haze obscured the spoke-like beams from the sun now dipping behind the ridge of dark clouds lining the west horizon; and the wrecked monoplane Deland noted to be already hidden by the distance. To him the air machines looked in the livid gloom like a fantasy of monstrous devil birds hovering and swooping, turning and mounting, in a widely scattered formation around and above the two vessels, that were steaming slow in line abreast N.N.E., the *Britannia* drawing most of the enemy's virulence.

Now and again a jump of white water, or a flock of red, showed when a bomb had missed its blinded prey or had struck her deck or upperworks.

Perwynne replaced the stopper of the wireless cabin's voice-tube. Catching his junior officer's eye, he shook his head.

"God help England this night," said Deland within his heart, "ninety minutes of their rocketing ahead, and Sheerness'll be in flames—and London in terror."

"They have swept across Holland, keeping out of sight topsides of the dirt we have had all day," cried Perwynne to him. "Between forty and fifty of them. . . . Yes, I make out forty-five at least. . . . We've to try to stop their rush, somehow."

"Flagship down by the bows, sir. She's been knocked about previously."

Already a subdivision of four monoplanes had stood out of the mazy concentric disposition, and was coming along full tilt. Stridently, with canted muzzle, the destroyer's bow quickfirer spat forth shells.

The leading unit of the racing line pivoted out of the area of bursting projectiles; but the splinters evidently damaged the second craft's left balancing wing. She tilted dangerously as if turning over on that side, then slowly glided seaward to get rest on her pontoons. Under the shock of rifle fire meeting her, the aviator was riddled with bullets and the frail fabric smashed into tattered wreckage.

Yet the other two had, bird-like, darted up to 4000 feet, out of the gun's trajectory, and even now were dropping like hawks to inflict the deathblow. The destroyer veered away to enfilade them. From her deck the concentrated small-arms' fire killed the bomb-thrower in the third aeroplane, his squirming body hanging half in and half out of the cradle, upsetting the machine in its tumble seaward.

But on the sea craft's forecastle a missile from the

rearmost enemy fell with a sickening thud, to roll off into the water to port, unexploded. Another burst in the sea to starboard ere the foe had fled astern.

Then into Perwynne's eye leaped a dim, midget figure on the top of the flagship's after barbette; the destroyer, having hoisted her private number, now making to pass astern and come up to starboard. With unparalleled coolness amid the infernal hubbub of spluttering gun and erupting bomb, the signalman using his arms was swiftly semaphoring her orders. Sheet lightning flashing out beyond, he and the battleship—crumpled and wrecked upperworks and jury-rigged wireless mast—stood outlined, exact and rigid like details of a picture etched in fire.

Upon the impenetrable darkness filling the vision for a moment or two, there gushed a yellow splash that billowed into a dull glow on the *London's* after-deck. Amidst the scuffling thunder overhead Perwynne felt lips touch his ear, and heard his signalman's voice. Its frail, indomitable sound symbolised an infinity of thought, resolution, and purpose of duty.

"Flagship signals, sir. . . . Come up . . . port quarter . . . wounded."

When the destroyer swept round the stern of the battleship the top of her after barbette was a flaming pyre; and bluejackets with wet sacks were endeavouring to beat out the blazing fluid flowing over the barbette structure and adjoining deck. Monoplanes swooped down from different points; one succeeding in dashing her fire bomb on to the flagship's forecastle; another in lodging a missile that blew out the face of the forward superstructure.

A projectile, dropped wide, threw up a great cone of spray washing over the destroyer's bows as she surged abreast of a large jagged gap just above the *London's* waterline. But, to a signalling arm from a group gathering there, she fell into station alongside.

At a glance her Bridge took in that the *London* had been severely handled in a very recent engagement. It was noted, too, that the *Britannia* drew ahead, away to starboard, taking the weight of the attack. The air craft were seen indistinctly, save when electric fluid emblazoned the air, some diving in 'vol plane' to discharge their shells on the cruiser's sputtering deck, some rising to return and swoop down again, trying to blast the gun positions and small-arms fire. A few on being hit exploded in mid-air into goutts of fire, others plunged headlong waterward.

Obscured by the sultry murk and the fast-falling darkness—glimpsed in the play of lightning which was most intense in the north—the scene was as a nightmare of Hell's. Yet, on the destroyer's after-deck, two blue-jackets as ordered were making every effort to rescue a half-burnt and blinded aviator, who groaning heavily was floating near by, supported by the air-chambers of his disabled machine.

The scout heaved nervously, and her commanding officer's sea-bred instincts responded. To the seamen making fast the hawser, which had been attached to a handline cast on board, rang his urgent hail.

Thrice the extemporised cradle was rapidly hauled across, and the moaning wounded were deposited in safety on the small craft's deck.

But on the fourth trip delay ensued.

The light of the lanterns dimly shining in the wrecked bunker behind the gap in the ruptured armour, showed a small cluster of bareheaded, dishevelled men urging a grey-haired Flag Officer in torn uniform to be seated in the cradle. He, stiff in bandages and splints, was stubbornly resisting the faithful arms supporting him. Indignantly, with his free hand, he indicated the wounded being put down behind him by stretcher-bearers.

Just then a bomb broke on the flagship's upper deck

between amidship and forward casemates; and down her side seethed a broad cascade of purplish fire: a burning figure leaped screaming into the sea. Singed, half-naked, blackened beings, led by a cursing officer, plied hoses and sodden 'gummies' desperately on the fresh conflagration.

Of a sudden Perwynne hailed the *London* peremptorily. Even as the hawser was cut, there came the first swirl of wind, a confusing run of sea joggling the small craft, and then hard upon this a terrific flash of pronged fire sheer across the darkness ahead. The stunning effect of the crashing, rolling peal was lost in a vast, quivering white blaze that enveloped sky and sea as if creation had burst on fire.

For that infinitesimal fraction of time everything appeared to stand still in the shadowless glare, to be gulfed instantaneously in inky darkness. Yet with Perwynne—ringing his engines to full-speed ahead, and deafened, blinded by the elemental outbreak—there remained an impression of the gaunt, grey cruiser ahead with bows hove up on a crumbling wall of rushing, white-lipped seas; and of specks overhead—some afar, bursting into flaming atoms in the lightning stroke—some nearer at hand, broken and turned somersets by the tremendous breath of the gale, the shrieking of which now belched on the ear.

It came down with appalling swiftness. The few remnants of the aerial force vainly tried to flee before it, keeping low to escape the danger zone above.

Half an hour later, when the destroyer tumbling, smashing, cleaving invincibly, drove along the homeward track amid buffeting seas, her C.O., clinging to the rail of his bridge, lifted his eyes from where astern there last had been seen the outlines of cruiser and sinking battleship.

"In touch with Whitehall and running off the news. Good," he exclaimed, mouth close to the ear of Deland,

who had reported. "It's been touch-and-go for Old England's nerves. Queer how what brought about the wireless jam should save us. Coincidence — of course!"

That was just what Dcland did not think.

THE MAN WHO STOPPED THE WAR

“ I WILL be shot ? ”

“ You will be shot,” replied the lieutenant. “ You will be shot as a spy if you do not answer Captain von Eisenkopf’s questions.”

“ And, if I do ?—which is rather unlikely, considering I am who I am.”

“ You will be shot as a spy.”

“ The very devil of a fix, this is ! ”

There was silence for some seconds in the cabin. The prisoner appeared to be considering his straits.

“ I must decline the honour of being riddled with bullets on your bridge or quarter-deck,” said he at length, a wry smile flitting over his lean, brown face. “ Get on the scene of hostilities I must. It is a new feature, surely, for you good people to call a British naval intelligence officer a ‘ spy ’ ? ”

Lieutenant Raschler shrugged his stalwart shoulders.

“ My credentials,” continued the prisoner in even tones, “ I note have been taken out of my pocket, and, doubtless, are in safe keeping. They have been perused ? ”

“ They have been perused,” repeated the officer in an impatient voice. “ I trust, Lieutenant Chichely, you will not require me to use force to take you to the bridge.”

“ You do hustle ! ” grunted the prisoner. “ ‘ Come up and be killed,’ that’s what you are politely telling me. I say again, I am not Lieutenant Chichely. If I was, do you think I’d have been such a d——d fool as to be caught in your noose ? You’ve lost for me the one chance there has been to the lot of us of getting to the front.

I am up against both sides in this row ; neither will let us see things."

A smile of obvious misbelief passed over Raschler's blunt features as he politely handed him his clothes. These, the journalist noted, had been carefully mended, and all traces of the struggle effaced.

"You certainly carry it on with a sang-froid, admirable as ever I saw amongst you all when I put in my period in Great Britain," he remarked. "I am very sorry—we all are—for what is coming to you. But——"

"Oh, d——d your pity, mein Herr !" jerked out the prisoner, buttoning his vest. "What d'ye call your 'period' in Great Britain ?"

"It is when we privately make ourselves professionally acquainted with your resources," replied Lieutenant Raschler, helping him on with his coat ; "it is not compulsory, but our Admiralität do look with favour upon it. . . . Oh, you Engländerers are so open and accommodating."

"More than you folks are, in treating me this way," snorted the captive, turning to leave the cabin with him.

A chill swept into the newspaper man.

Undoubtedly he had been taken to be Lieutenant Chichely, whose activity and abilities as naval intelligence officer had become too celebrated to remain concealed. And at that thought his high-cheeked face became charged with an expression, in which gratified pride mingled with despair.

Was it not a fitting expiation if he were shot instead of him ?

Repressing his shudder, he inwardly cursed himself for a coward.

As escorted by Lieutenant Raschler he was being taken to the Bridge, it came to him that the distant reports of guns were now opening out into long-drawn thunderings. Was it possible he had arrived at last on the scene of the

engagement that might decide the safety of Britain, of the British Empire, and the Command of the High and Narrow Seas ?

Here ?—with Death treading on his heels !

Dismay took him. It was not at his forthcoming fate.

On the upper deck squads of seamen were busy with tackle and gear dropping the contact mines lying in cradles to port and starboard abaft the bridge. Off the bows ten huge warships in column ahead, grim in their portentousness of destruction, were steaming fast on an easterly course slanting across the minelayer's incompleting section.

Even as he eagerly strained his eyes the first roars of their port guns, directed on an unseen foe in the north-east, swelled the exultant voice of War.

Yes ! He was inside the zone of Armageddon.

Shielding his eyes with his hands, the prisoner paused for a few seconds at the foot of the bridge-ladder, despite the lieutenant, and stared excitedly over the placid sunlit waters.

Nothing more of the hostilities was to be noted as yet.

But in him the rolling cannonade evoked a feeling of elation, which was strangely at variance with his circumstances. His blood was responding to The Old Call.

Fate was fortifying him.

The commanding officer of the *Stettin* removed the binoculars from his eyes, and stared at him.

Short, sandy-haired, and sallow-faced, the cheek-bones broad and prominent in his flat features, the German showed that in his look which touched the journalist sharper than wordy insult.

"You've fixed this up all wrong, you'll find," the war correspondent rasped, advancing some steps ahead of his guard. "I am a journalist—*New York Sun*. . . . Was going off, yesterday afternoon, to the *Union Flag*, U.S. Red Cross vessel, moored in Christiansand Roads, when your

pinnacle lifted me, in neutral territorial waters, out of the American's galley. . . . What can you want with me ? ”

Captain von Eisenkopf took a deep breath. His hard, blue eyes travelled over the prisoner. But he appeared to be giving close attention to the clamour of the guns.

“ Ach ! It is good, sehr good, to get you into our hands at last,” he replied in a short, timbreless voice, and giving a nod of emphasis. “ It is a fresh rôle for you, Lieutenant Chichely—‘ press correspondent ! ’ What is the strength of Rear-Admiral Cochrane's reinforcement joining the British Commander-in-Chief last night ? ”

“ I am not Chichely of the Naval Intelligence,” persisted the prisoner. “ Bucombe—Charles Frewin Bucombe—of the *New York Sun*, that's me. Detached from our New York office for service at the front.”

“ Your face, your tongue, betray you, Lieutenant Chichely. You have die choice——”

But a hail from the sighting top checked von Eisenkopf.

Out of the wireless cabin, where receivers thrummed with recording orders from the Senior Flagship of the Imperial Fleet, thundering out nineteen miles away, an orderly dashed across the bridge, in his hand a code slip for the commanding officer.

Bucombe's gaze had fled where could be seen the outline of the British squadron rapidly rising out of the north-east by north. At full speed it was coming down on the ten warships now off the *Stettin's* starboard bow—Vice-Admiral Esenwein's fated command.

Von Eisenkopf crumpled the marconigram between his fingers. His curt orders rang out like the cut of a whip. The minelayer leaped forward.

With redoubled speed she laid her deadly weapons.

Her consorts to port and starboard having completed their sections, astern, of the extensive minefields were already standing for protection towards Esenwein's squadron.

"The strength, I ask you, of your reinforcement," the Imperial officer snapped, consuming the prisoner with wrathful eyes. "You decline?"

"Decline?" Bucombe flashed out, his deep voice savage with contumely. "If I were Chichely I wouldn't tell you, and not being him I don't know."

Captain Eisenkopf gave a significant gesture to Lieutenant Raschler near by, his voice rang out brief and sharp. From behind the charthouse a file of armed seamen came round at the double, and seized Bucombe.

The pressman stared in desperation at Cochrane's belching line—just as if vehement volition could take him thither into safety.

Unconsciously he braced himself.

A voice amidships hailed the Bridge; consternation, alarm, thrilled its notes. In a trice von Eisenkopf and his officers were hurrying down the ladder towards No. 7 mine, the gripper of which, having slipped in handling, was endangering its contact charges. Bugles shrilled danger imperatively.

In Bucombe the instinct to live burst forth, imperious and uncontrollable.

Wrenching himself out of the seamen's grip, he smote right and left hand blows, that sent two Germans reeling. He dodged the rifle-butts. With a furious jerk that rent his clothes in tatters, he dashed for the starboard rail.

A jar shook the minelayer. Amidships fragments of wood and steel gouted up amongst flame and smoke enveloping both deck and mine-cradles.

As the journalist, who had dived from the sounding ledge, cleaved the breast of the swell, the *Stettin* hoisted herself into hurtling wreckage.

Six fathoms deep, he struck out desperately for the surface.

A thousand noises agonised his senses, together with the sensation of being choked, squashed to pieces. Gasp-

ing and exhausted, he rose to the light of the sun, only to be overwhelmed again by the successive welters of broken water cast up by the explosion.

Then his hands struck a piece of wreckage, and gripped it. Clinging to the top of the minelayer's charthouse, he managed to wriggle himself out of the water and lay on his stomach, arms and legs outspread on the woodwork to balance it.

Panting and half-dazed, he thought of nothing save his miraculous escape.

In time the hubbub of the guns, their reports now a continuous series of deafening thwack-thwacks, aroused him. Slewing himself cautiously round, so as not to upset his raft, he cast his eyes about.

Much loose wreckage and many disfigured and mangled bodies floated in his neighbourhood, sole tokens of the minelayer. Ahead, Cochrane's line was seeking to cross Esenwein's T. The German officer, Bucombe marked, had altered course to north-north-east half north in order to stand parallel with the British column. Unit after unit, veering in succession, was being ruptured, devastated, by the grouped broadsides of the eight British battleships.

But ahead of them the four units of the 2nd Division of the British Rear Squadron, Main Fleet, hastily detached from supporting the turning movement of the Main Fleet now edging the enemy's main battle-line to the north-west, was steaming south-south-west to cross Esenwein's rear. Soon it, too, would be pouring in its hurricane fire.

Yet in a little time these two British forces were to fall into the trap.

Bucombe hollowed his hands about his eyes, and stared for many minutes at the monstrous panorama of life and death. Feelings, thoughts, instincts of race and heritage again arose, avid and fierce for action. In his excitement he sprang up, but panic-stricken, flopped down again on his raft tilting steep.

All the horrors of his fate thronged upon him. Desperately he embraced the wet woodwork.

Across the reaches of northern sea *Esenwein's* column, though shell-eaten and harassed, were firing with terrible effect, compelling Rear-Admiral Cochrane to stand away to evade the raking cannonade.

Even as Bucombe noticed this he saw, too, smoke and flame belch up on board the leading British unit, just abaft her fore bridge. In clouds the murky matter swiftly enveloped her amidships and after barbettes.

A gout of shells lodged against her shattered superstructure, and the wreckage of it tumbled down. The debris of thickly painted metal and woodwork appeared to be ignited in the tornado of projectiles bursting on and low overhead the Junior Flagship. She gyrated to port in darts and curves—her steering-gear disabled.

Then Bucombe judged that her propellers had mastered her, for she staggered out of action, apparently again under control.

While fighting the fires she surged down into the neighbourhood of the *Stettin's* disaster.

The remote possibility of being rescued threw Bucombe into a delirium of hopes and fears. But when a ricocheting shell screamed past, he came to calmer senses. Tearing off his ragged jacket, he half-raised himself, and began energetically signalling the flagship.

"The minefields . . . the minefields . . ." he groaned. "The enemy are inveigling us on them. . . ."

Slowly the maimed battleship slugged down, losing way, though still crashing out on *Esenwein's* van with all guns bearing.

Her starboard side, now full and plain to Bucombe, was punched open from amidships to forward starboard barrette in a series of irregular lateral gaps and fissures. Just above the waterline, abaft the starboard ammunition-trunk to her fore barrette, a large cavity had been battered in by the armour-piercing projectiles.

Inside it a small party of bluejackets were hurriedly erecting a breastwork, to stem the inrush of sea as the huge vessel squashed suddenly through the swells.

Bucombe madly waved to them, and in his frenzy hulloaed as if outvoicing the stupendous voices of the engagement. He had forgotten himself.

Knowledge of the end so soon to overtake the two British Admirals drove him frantic. When from the bluejackets low down on the *Benbow's* waterline the looped end of a line fell across the wreckage, as she swayed past barely a biscuit-throw away, Bucombe, slipping the bight under his armpits, shouted his information as if mere utterance could save.

A gory-faced seaman, clinging cat-like to a projecting fragment of metal-work scooped him up, then fell back against the lip of breastwork.

His mates gripped them fast.

"Here's a blooming funny fmg!" jerked out the petty officer in charge, wiping with one hand the sweat out of his astonished eyes, while, with the other, he and another supported the *Stettin's* survivor.

"Aint it!" quoth the other, clearing his throat. "'Ow comes 'e to be in the water? Gawd A'mighty, the connin'-tower can't have been punched overboard? Anythin' can 'appen in this bit of 'ell!"

"The Admiral? . . . The Admiral? . . . The——"

Bucombe's gasping voice was lost in the outbreak of thundering cannon overhead.

"Hope he's safe, sir," replied the petty officer, saluting, and helping him to rise. "You'll have to go up by the starboard ladder, port blocked wiv wreckage, sir, and the fires."

The pressman reeled along the near shellroom passage.

The air was stifling hot and thick with the fumes of the fires taken in by the ventilating fans. He breathed in deep, harsh gulps.

A sub-lieutenant, with left arm in a sling, brushed impetuously past, driving him against the bulkhead.

The officer swung round on his heel.

He peered for a second or two at him in a puzzled manner.

"Oh! you, sir," he ejaculated, thinking he recognised the face. "Sorry to knock up against you. . . . Hardly knew you in all this muck. Fresh report called for on waterline damages. . . . The Admiral? . . . by the for'a'd port barbette."

Swiftly the battle of the so-called 'German' Sea was drawing to its close.

The brag of 'Deutschland suf dem Meer'—and the very life of the British Empire—was being finally decided at the mouths of 12-inch guns.

They are the arbiter of national destinies. Not the palavers and chicanery of diplomacy—upright or insincere!

What the guns of Britain won—only the guns of Britain can hold.

On that memorable afternoon, along the horizon away towards Scandinavia, the British Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Jardine, was enveloping the enemy's centre and van squadrons. His columns crossed and recrossed both their rear and head; till in time their formation was destroyed, and undisable units trailed away north-west in two and threes, stubbornly but spasmodically engaging their pursuers.

Off the port beam of Cochrane's flagship, the 2nd Division of the British Rear Squadron had pulverised Esenwein's rear into disorder.

Yet the German centre and van were edging the seven units of Cochrane's command on to the minefields. They were also drawing the 2nd Division, now inclining for their van, upon that section incompleated by the *Stettin*.

Bucombe did not notice the distant lines.

Exhausted and breathless, he staggered across the

deck into shelter of the port forward barbette. He saw only the figure of the C.I.C. of the British reinforcement, his few surviving staff-officers about him.

Short, and somewhat slouching, bareheaded, his face streaked here and there with blood from abrasions caused by flying splinters, and with the left shoulder of his frayed uniform cut into shreds by slivers and metal chips, 'Fighting Jack' Cochrane was the embodiment of John Bull in hostilities.

He was staring with lowering face and puckered brows at the thundering columns away to port. At times it was impossible to see anything owing to everything being distorted by the quivering air.

Shell fragments from missiles exploding on the fore barbette swept along screeching—cutting down some of the bluejackets, drowning the small fires. The *Benbow's* answer reverberated in two tremendous concussions.

Bucombe was almost overpowered by the gush of fumes, scorching and acrid.

He jerked the Rear-Admiral's elbow.

"Minefields . . . ahead . . . our vessels. Minefields, ahead. . . ."

Someone a few feet away, and also in civilian rig, caught a glimpse of him. He fell back as if his eyes beheld a wraith, then leaped to his side.

"Ralph ? . . . Ralph ? . . ."

But his astounded voice went unheeded in that cataclysm of life and death.

The Commander-in-Chief had wheeled on his heel.

"Minefields !" he volleyed, "what minefields ? You said nothing about them, before, Chichely."

Over his round face bewilderment and wrath mixed with consternation, and for a second or two his was a ludicrous expression.

"Who the devil are you ? Not Chichely ! . . . No, not you, but so d——d like !" stormed the Rear-Admiral. " . . . Minefields ? . . ."

"Ahead—straight . . . ahead, sir. Bucombe . . . *Stettin* . . . consorts . . ." the newspaper man pumped out in deep gasps, reeling with exhaustion.

Sir John's voice rang incisively—an officer disappeared.

Assured that he could do no more, the Flag Officer turned to his Intelligence Officer, who had caught Bucombe in his arms.

"How the deuce has he come on board—from the skies?" grunted the C.I.C. "He's Bucombe—that journalist the enemy lifted out of the *Union Flag's* galley. Yes, I remember the wireless message. . . . Thank God, we are turning just in time."

"Driving them into their own trap, sir."

The Flag Officer's sinister white lips twitched.

The British steering gears swung round in answer to the Flagship's transmitters. Vessel after vessel of the divisions, turning respectively to port and starboard, safely cleared the minefields.

But, into their area Esenwein's squadron was forced through lack of room for manœuvring.

In reports like mightiest thunder came the end of the doomed column; in vomits of smoke and flame, of great steel hulls in shattered debris, throwing up geysers of wreck-thick sea. The few units escaping scattered into the south-east, British vessels in hot pursuit.

The Imperial High Sea Fleet was being annihilated.

Not this time was Germany to reduce Britain into impotence. Not this time was the tramp of foreign legions to exact tribute from Her and Her Allies.

The sea-girt Empire was still Mistress of the Seven Seas.

When Bucombe again stood before the C.I.C. of the 4th Squadron, Sir John spoke in husky, halting tones, so indicative of physical exhaustion.

"Yes, you may . . . a message . . . through to your paper. . . . Censored on board . . . of course, and . . . following on my first . . . despatches."

The *New York Sun's* correspondent saluted gratefully, and turned away. But the Rear-Admiral gesturing to him, he halted.

"You are the image of my Intelligence Officer! . . . How . . . is that?"

Bucombe reddened a little.

"Why, sir, I took Bucombe for my name, after I skidooed from England—got into trouble over money matters at home. I had made use of my brother's name, sir—just the idiotcy of youth. Lieutenant Chichely is my twin brother."

"Humph!" grunted the Flag Officer, slewing his eyes where a lopsided battleship was swaying past, towed by the N.Z. Dominion's nameship. "Whatever your . . . name . . . is—you . . . the man who stops . . . the war. . . . You are!"

For High Finance in the United States, panicstricken at the Christiansand outrage—which was executed, some say, neither in recklessness, nor without a nicety of judgment—was resiling hurriedly from the War Loan again being put on the markets. The American Republic, convulsed with wrath and indignation, had burst in twain the bars of diplomatic caution. Already the U.S. Atlantic Fleet was preparing to move eastward.

Peace—or total financial collapse.

These were the alternatives to which the Teutonic Alliance had to succumb.

Lieutenant Chichely's brother stopped the war.

THE END

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